

CHINESE EYES, EURASIAN EYES ON TIMOTHY MO'S NOVELS

BY

CHOI YAN YAN CECILIA

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## Abstract

*Chinese Eyes, Eurasian Eyes On Timothy Mo's Novels* is an attempt to provide a more comprehensive view of Mo's novels and of their literary values. As a novelist of the contemporary world, Mo has successfully conglomerated various traits in his works to give the sense of in-betweenness experienced by immigrants: these traits include the 'fluid' nature of identity in the contemporary world and the employment of 'Other' settings in the novels. All these deserve our attention in analyzing Mo's novels with their special treatment of the notion of cultural identity. As a writer who was educated and now lives in England, Mo has demonstrated his skills in showing the sensibilities of non-English characters. Chapter One deals with the discourse of 'cultural identity' put forward by Stuart Hall, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Rey Chow. Cultural identity is an important discourse in the contemporary post-colonial world, one that we find as a recurring motif in Mo's novels. Chapter Two will proceed to analyze Mo's novels: *The Monkey King*, *Sour Sweet*, *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* using the theories put forward in Chapter One. In Chapter Three, this dissertation will also discuss women's subaltern nature in Mo's novels. The final chapter will be a discussion of different critical responses to Mo's novels and the problems that those responses have created for analyzing Mo's novels. This dissertation hopes to take a wider approach to Mo's novels than those which, at least for the most part, have previously been taken.

## 撮要

〈Timothy Mo 小說中的中國觀 中亞觀〉一文嘗試提供一個比較寬闊的文學角度來探究毛氏小說。作為一個當代作家，毛氏全面剖析了移民者的身份問題。小說中所展現的「身份兩頭不到岸」的滋味、世界「流動性」的身份，以及運用「他者」的背景，這些都讓我們進一步思索毛氏小說的主題——文化身份。雖然，毛氏在英接受教育及工作，但對於刻劃非英國人物的性格和情感方面，卻有細膩的描繪。

本文第一章概括有關「文化身分」的論述，其中包括霍爾(Stuart Hall)、史域娃(Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak)及周蕾(Rey Chow)的論述。「文化身份」是後殖民論述中重要的一環，也是毛氏小說反覆出現的主題。第二章闡析毛氏四本小說：《孫悟空》、《酸甜》、《當勇氣變得多餘時》和《麵包林蔭大道的燈火爛珊》。第三章討論小說中女性的次等地位。第四章則道出其他評論家對毛氏小說的批評及分析箇中的漏洞，籍此希望集思廣益，以深廣的層面來討論毛氏小說的價值。



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## ABBREVIATIONS USED FOR TIMOTHY MO'S WORKS

MK	<i>The Monkey King</i>
SS	<i>Sour Sweet</i>
RC	<i>The Redundancy of Courage</i>
BBB	<i>Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard</i>

## Introduction

Amid the many migrant writers of contemporary Britain, there is Timothy Mo, a Eurasian. Mo is a migrant although his mother is English. Mo's father is a Hong Kong Chinese. Although he has a dual cultural background, Kate Kellaway observed of Mo's personalities that,

Mo is both serious and a jester. Much of what he says about himself falls into the category of the serious joke. He says it is a mistake to think of the offspring of mixed parents as being like 'café au lait.' He sees himself (but as) not as a mixture of races but as someone who can switch '100 per cent' from one to another. He looks Chinese, feels Chinese but his beard is red when he lets it grow. (*The Observer* 62)

When Mo was 18 months old, his parents divorced. His father was a Hong Kong lawyer and later re-married a Chinese wife, which may account for why Mo displays so much information concerning Hong Kong in his first two novels *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet*. Mo went to Britain with his mother when he was ten and he completed his degree in History at Balliol College, Oxford. He then became a boxing journalist. Mo has published five novels so far: *The Monkey King* (1978), *Sour Sweet* (1982), *An Insular Possession* (1986), *The Redundancy of Courage* (1991) and *Brownout in Breadfruit Boulevard* (1995).

This thesis will aim to analyse the way which Mo in his novels deals with the representation of identity. Mo's novels broach the confrontation between "First-World" and "Third-World" constructions of identity. The portrayal of an individual's marginalized identity of an individual caught up to a web of monolithic culture is frequent in his novels. These novels convey a sense of



change and mobility and present Third-World people and their culture caught in the interplay between First and the Third-World cultures as we can see in *The Monkey King*, *Sour Sweet*, *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*. For reasons which will be explained, *An Insular Possession* is itself somewhat marginal to the interests of this thesis and it will not be extensively treated.

In the discussion of the notion of identity, post-colonial theory has emphasized a fluidity of identity that Mo's novels vividly illustrate in various post-colonial contexts. I have chosen three cultural critics, who have developed their discourses on the notion of identity in terms of culture, gender and ethnicity in order to help deepen my analysis of Mo's novels. Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity is helpful diagnosing the identity problems of the protagonists in the above four novels. In the discussion of gender consciousness, I will draw on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's discourse of sub-alternity. Rey Chow's discussion of diaspora is used to give a Chinese context to the discussion of cultural identity. The representation of Chinese characters and Chinese settings is frequent in the above novels.

My thesis will bifurcate into the discussion of cultural identity on the one hand, and the notion of 'double-otherness' in relation to Chinese women. On the other hand, many critics have discussed the literary values of *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet* in terms of Chinese Confucian contexts only. Identity, in fact, is the leitmotif in the four chosen novels and this thesis will focus on the construction of post-colonial identity because there is not so far any analysis which shows the connection of cultural identity found in Mo's novels.



Chapter one consists of a discussion of the respective theories of Stuart Hall on cultural identity, Gayatri Spivak on sub alternity, and Rey Chow on diaspora. Chapter two is an analysis of the construction of cultural identity in the chosen four novels. Chapter three focuses specifically on the female subjectivity in the novels. Chapter Four discusses the issue of the post-colonial discourses that are found in Mo's novels.

## Chapter One

### Discussion of major concepts of Stuart Hall, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Rey Chow's cultural identity

#### Things Fall Apart, the Centre cannot hold

The above line quoted from W.B. Yeats' *The Second Coming* was taken by Chinua Achebe as the title of his novel *Things Fall Apart*, first published in 1958. Achebe's title marked a new era in post-colonial literature forty years ago. This new era has re-inscribed a new sense of subjectivity in literature in English, a new centre, and a new reading direction. This new sense of subjectivity has been developing for several decades now. What is the state of the discourse of subjectivity in the post-colonial context now? The following discussion will focus on the analyses of Stuart Hall, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Rey Chow.

The choice of these three cultural critics is because of their being representatives of contemporary discourse on cultural identity. All of them were born in colonies and received their education (up to their first degrees) in those colonies and then went on to further their education in the United Kingdom or the United States.

Stuart Hall is a Jamaican. His father worked at the US corporation, United Fruit Company. His father was the first Jamaican appointed to any senior post, these having all been held by Americans before. Hall's parents came from middle-class families but of somewhat different levels. Hall's grandfather opened a grocery shop in the suburbs of Kingston, the capital of Jamaica. Hence, the family of Hall's father was lower-middle class. The descent on Hall's father's side is hybridised. There were African, Portuguese, Jewish and East Indians

forbears. The family of Hall's mother were Jamaican Creoles and her cousins were doctors and lawyers educated in England. Though his mother is a Creole, Hall carries the darkest skin. Hall comes from a hybridised family background of both native and Creole families.

Hall has stressed that his family, particularly his mother, was extremely class-conscious. His mother had a strong recognition of the colonizer and looked down upon the 'inferior' mainstream Jamaican culture. Hall's mother expected Hall to be well educated at Oxford and to return to Jamaica as a superior Jamaican and enter into the upper-middle-class social circles of Jamaica. Hall was well educated at Oxford but chose to stay in the United Kingdom as a cultural critic rather than become one of Jamaica's social superiors. Hall has transformed his consciousness and disappointed his mother. Hall became very active in raising consciousness of issues of Third-World identity in the United Kingdom. Hall's strong recognition of his indigenous identity and his devotion to working on establishing Third-World identity put the mother and son relationship in jeopardy. Hall's mother asked Hall not to return to Jamaica when she found out that her son had disappointed her. Hall has taught at the contemporary culture studies centre of Birmingham University for many years and was later professor of sociology at the Open University. He retired in October, 1997.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was born in Calcutta, India. She received a B.A. in English from the University of Calcutta. She went to the United States in 1961 and received her Ph.D in comparative literature from Cornell University. Spivak was a student of Paul de Man when working on her PhD thesis. She spent a year as a research student at Girton College, Cambridge before she finished her Ph.



D at Cornell. Spivak has been a restless scholar. She has taught at many different colleges, including the University of Iowa, the University of Texas, Emory University and the University of Pittsburgh. She has also lectured and given seminars in Canada, Australia, India and Hong Kong. In an interview for the *Melbourne Journal of Politics* on 17 August 1986, Spivak explained her restless lecturing thus, 'as far as I can tell, one is always on the run, and it seems I haven't really had a home base-and this may have been good for me. I think it's important for people not to feel rooted in one place.'(*The Post-colonial critic, Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* 37) Spivak pursues different intellectual confrontations and stimulation through visiting different places and meeting different people. Apart from being a professor of English literature, Spivak is also a Marxist, feminist, deconstructionist and post-colonialist. Her many famous works include her translation of Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie*, with a critical introduction. Her most recent publication is *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason Toward a History of Vanishing Present* (1999).

Rey Chow was born and brought up in Hong Kong. After receiving her first degree in Hong Kong, she moved to the United States and wrote her Ph.D. in education there. She has been a critic of Chinese cultural representation in films and fiction. In her famous book, *Writing Diaspora*, she has pinpointed the diasporic culture and nature of Chinese in the United States. Rey Chow has been a critic of Chinese cultural representation in relation to "First-World" discourse.

My three chosen critics are representative because of their backgrounds. All were born in colonies and received their post-graduate education in either the United Kingdom or the United States. Stuart Hall belongs to the first generation of

migrants who came to the United Kingdom after the second World War. He has contributed to the making of a "Third-World" space and identity. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has distinguished herself by her opening up of a feminist subaltern consciousness. Rey Chow has discussed a sense of Chineseness projected out Chinese people as a whole by the mass media, literature, and real life.

Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, critical discussion of Third World identity and culture has centred on the question of whether identity is something that's or is constructed. *Orientalism* challenged the Eurocentric domination of interpretation about the perception of Orientals in the eyes of Occidentals. *Orientalism* focused on Anglo-French discourse's determination for Oriental identity,

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident". Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind", destiny, and so on. (*Orientalism* 2-3)

Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* further interrogates the fractured identity (both national and cultural) of the "Third world" (the Oriental) under the depiction of the "First World" (the occidental). The formation of Oriental identity in the Occidental discourse is formed out of an Occidental voice. Said's discourse



of identity is influential in accounting for “Third World” and marginal subjectivity in the literary world. There is a similar recurring theme in Mo’s novels. The juxtaposition between places and people of different worlds, social classes and culture. This contrast complicates and enriches the plots and psychological conflicts that the characters confront. We therefore have to first discuss the significance of such differences between the Oriental and the Occidental, before we further discuss Mo’s novels in the following chapters. Apart from the inclusion of Said’s discourse concerning the difference between the Oriental and the Occidental, I find it also necessary to take into account Hall’s discourse of identity in analysing the subjects in Mo’s novels since Hall has suggested more about the characteristics of identity among immigrants in ‘their other country’.

Stuart Hall takes the angle of subjectivity instead of challenging the formative discourse of the Anglo-French enterprise. Subjectivity is different from identity: subjectivity involves building up of consciousness to construct a selfhood in a psychoanalytic framework and the making of a discursive formation by cultural construction and gender formation. Identity, however, involves much more the exterior construction of the Self with history, ideology and cultural constituents which add other factors to selfhood besides gender and culture. Yet, both discussions are circuitous. Hall puts more emphasis on both the psychoanalytic and Althusserian frameworks. Hall stresses that identity is floating and subject to various factors, psychoanalytic or ideological,

Identity is such a concept - operating ‘under erasure’ in the interval between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought

in the old way, but without certain key questions cannot be thought at all.

....

In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with a deal, and with natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the 'naturalism' of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed--always 'in process'. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned.

("Introduction: Who needs 'identity?'" 2)

The above quotation reveals Hall's several concerns. First, identity is built out of a process of identification, the building up of an identity is an evolving process. Second, Hall stresses that his definition of identity is not biologically deterministic. Identity is not born with a person but influenced by different entities (in both psychoanalytic and discursive contexts), and these entities are not surrogates of each other. Identity is subjected to multifarious construction and substitution. One entity raises and fills up another which reacts back on the first entity, and so on.

Therefore, identity to Hall is 'the point of suture' (Ibid 5), different constructions join together to form subjectivity is Hall's main argument,

Identities are the result of a successful articulation or 'chaining' of the subject into the flow of discourse, what Stephen Heath, in his

path-breaking essay on 'suture' called 'an intersection (1981:106)

"A theory of ideology must begin not from the subject but as an account of suturing effects, the effecting of the join of the subject in the structures of meaning.(Ibid 6)

Identities are constructed out of 'suturing'. In other words, fractured identity is plausible. Subjectivity is no longer a unified entity. Discursive formation is part of identity construction. For Hall, subjectivity is a more enriching word since it involves the discussion of consciousness and discursive construction,

Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' (the language of consciousness here betray us) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate-identical-to the subject processes which are invested in them. (Ibid 6)

Hall later adds to this, citing the role of the identification of the Other in Lacan's Mirror stage. The Other, according to Hall's reading of Lacan, is the subject's perception of an ideal ego. Hall, however, suggests another side, claiming that the role of mother is not only that of the projection of an ideal ego. The subject or the baby forms his self-hood only through the reflection of the Other, that is the mother. Hall perceives language as a construct of consciousness to fill up our lack,

The Mirror stage is not the *beginning* of something, but the *interruption*- the loss, the lack, the division- which initiates the process that 'founds' the sexually differentiated subject (and the



unconscious) and this depends not alone on the instantaneous formation of some internal cognitive capacity, but on the dislocating rupture of the look from the place of the Other.(Ibid 9)

Hall's opinion is that the mirror stage is an interruption of one's formation of subjectivity. It is only through the discovery of the existence of the 'other' that the baby finds its lack, discovers the existence of the other. Subjectivity therefore, begins to enter into the stage of fracture since the baby discovers that he himself is not the only man a subject unified. Also, the discovery of that female object which is the mother marks the stage of awareness of sexual difference in the constitution of subjectivity.

For the discursive formation, Hall has quoted Laclau (1990) about the relationship between power and social identity,

the constitution of a social identity is an act of power (Ibid 5) ....

The question which remains is whether we also require to, as it were, close the gap between the two: that is to say, a theory of what the mechanisms are by which individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions' to which they are summoned, as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and 'perform' these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, agonistic (agnostic) process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves. (Ibid 13)

The construction of subjectivity is circuitous and the subject's own reaction to different confrontations plays a crucial part in the formation of subjectivity: to accept, to perform, to revamp and reject. The question of identity, according to Hall, denies any mere determinism. In fact, subjectivity is the confrontation of exterior discursive formations and psychic consciousness. Therefore, identity, in Hall's view is a rebirth out of other constructions and, therefore, the phrase, 'cultural identity' is suggestive of that cultivation of identity which is applicable to contemporary migranhood.

While Stuart Hall experiences the voice of the Third-World male, Spivak opens up the space of the subaltern. Subaltern studies can be traced back to Antonio Gramsci and to Ranajit Guha. Gramsci's subalternity studies were concerned with the role of the subproletariat in the newly developed and urbanised Italy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gramsci was also concerned with the role of intellectuals in subaltern studies. Ranajit Guha's approach is sociological and based on studies of peasants and workers in southeast Asia and India. In a general post-colonial context, according to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, the word 'subaltern' conveys the meaning of belonging to 'an inferior rank' which 'includes peasants, workers and other groups denied access to hegemonic power' (*Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* 215). In other words, economically, subalterns are poor and their social positions are low. They are subject to hegemonic power in the post-colonial context.

Spivak introduces Guha's interpretation of the concept of the subaltern and refers to his social stratification:

1. Dominant foreign groups.



2. Dominant indigenous groups at all Indian level.

3. Dominant indigenous groups at regional, local level.

4. the terms 'people' and 'subaltern classes have been synonymous throughout this note. The social groups and elements included in this category *represent* the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'.' ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 284)

Spivak's quoting from Guha is necessary for her definition of the subaltern since Guha has contributed to the detailed definition of the Indian subaltern by means of sociological study. Spivak's targets are Indian women. Guha stresses the element of difference carried by the subaltern. Spivak's application of the concept of the subaltern to women is a progressively significant move. Women, peasants, workers are the suppressed groups in Indian society. They are the lower strata of society, the marginalized groups. They are voiceless, 'For the 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself.' (Ibid 285)

The subaltern remains voiceless and underrepresented. Subaltern identity remains underdeveloped in relation to the stratification of society. Spivak further develops the definition of the subaltern, in terms of gender awareness as well as of social class. Spivak stresses that the subaltern women cannot be represented within Anglo-American tradition,

...the problem of the muted subject of the subaltern woman, though not solved by an "essentialist" search for lost origins,

cannot be served by the call for more theory in Anglo-America either. (Ibid 295)

In an interview with Elizabeth Grosz, Spivak again expresses the above concern in an interview with Mahasveta Devi,

We will not be able to speak to women out there (the Third World) if we depend completely on conferences and anthologies by western-trained informants. (*Post-colonial Critic* 9)

Third-World feminist intellectuals are suspicious of the effectiveness and reliability of the discourse championed by First-World feminists. Though they are all feminists, the world is different. The discursive formation of subjectivity (in Althusser's terms) is different between Said and Hall. Division between the First-World and Third-World feminists depends on whether one can 'unlearn one's privilege as one's loss' (*Ibid*)

Spivak draws on the example of the Indian tradition (later abolished by the British), of self-immolation by the widow. The woman is the victim of a feudal society from outsiders' point of view. (The subaltern as victim is also relevant to the discourse of Rey Chow on the construction of Chinese identity). On the significance of self-immolation by the widow, Spivak explains,

For the female subject, a sanctioned self-immolation, even as it takes away the effect, of "fall" (*pataka*) attached to an unsanctioned suicide, brings praise for the act of choice on another register. But the inexorable ideological production of a sexed subject, such a death can be understood by the female subject as an

exceptional signifier of her own desire, exceeding the general rule for a widow's conduct.

....

Yet benevolent and enlightened males were and are sympathetic with the "courage" of the woman's free choice in the matter. They thus accept the production of the sexed subaltern subject...(“Can the subaltern speak?” 300)

*Sati* is an acceptable and explicable act for Indians. Indians have accepted woman's self-sacrificial role and have taken women as muted objects. The role of the female is constructed within the Hindu tradition, the dominant, discursive ideology. Such discursive formations constitute the females as objects rather than letting females construct their own subjectivity. Female subjectivity in Indian is constructed upon the Other, the dominant groups and individuals in Hindu society.

The British intervention to abolish *Sati* can therefore be regarded as an act by an 'Other' entity to construct female subjectivity: 'white men are saving brown women from the brown men'(Ibid 296) and 'the protection of women (today the 'third-world' women) becomes a signifier for the establishment of a *good* society....'(Ibid 298). According to Saussure, the meaning of the signifier depends on its difference from another signifier. The British intervention is a signifier that competes with the original dominant, Hindu signifier in transforming Indian women's subjectivity. Culture and ideological intervention take place when there is a confrontation of different political entities. Women, because of their muted and reticent subjectivity, are prone to be treated as objects to be transformed. Hence, female subjectivity is more vulnerable to discursive power.



The subaltern is simply switched from one hegemony to another, but is still voiceless and speechless. According to Spivak, if the subaltern can speak, then the subaltern is not a subaltern anymore.

Spivak also delineates the diasporic nature of Indian ethnic groups. Her conversation with Sneja Gunew in August 30, 1986 on *ABC Radio National on Saturday* cast some light on the issue of migranhood (*Post-colonial Critic*, Chapter 5). There are two features concerning the Indian migrants. According to Spivak, Indian immigrants in the early 60s were professionals who formed part of the brain drain in the United Kingdom and the United States. Africans in the United States also still face problems about their ethnic literary representation. Africans in the United States are more concerned with the problem of preserving traditional African culture whereas the continental Africans are more concerned with the formation of African literatures and related disciplines.

Chinese studies in the States, on the other hand, have both the instantaneous confrontation of fighting over its authenticity of traditions and the struggle in the formation of its discipline. The problems that the Chinese representation are a) the role of Chinese intellectuals in the United States; b) the mixing of Chinese and Asian literature as a unified genre; c) the double-otherness of women.

Like Indians and Jews and many other ethnic groups, the Chinese have become a diasporic group scattered throughout the world. The identity of the Chinese in America, for example, is heterogeneous because different Chinese went to the States at different times and for different reasons. The earliest generation of Chinese migrants to the States came from the poorest peasants of

late Qing China (the late nineteenth century). Chinese peasants were 'exported' to the States as railway workers or coal miners, particularly to Honolulu. Such mobility, however, did not enable them to change social position. Peasants in China and workers in the States were the lowest strata of their respective societies. The Chinese were still subaltern. The late Qing generation began the initial migrant stage of the Chinese. Since the period of late Qing, Chinese migrants have left their country of origin for many different political or economic reasons. There have been migrants from pre-Communist China, Communist China, Guomindang Taiwan and colonies like Hong Kong and Macau, who have sought more politically safe and more developed countries in order to survive.

Although the Chinese have been settled in the States for about a century already, Rey Chow proposes that they still must be regarded as the Other in the States. Chinese literature is asked to demonstrate its own Asianess and Western intellectuals become annoyed when they find that the indigenous intellectuals no longer stay in their positions,

The distinctive labelling of "Asian" is the sign of an allied insurgency among marginalized cultures within the establishment of the American university itself (*Writing Diaspora* 124).... What confronts the western scholars is the discomfoting fact that the natives are no longer staying in their frames. (*Ibid* 128)

Asian literature is constructed as a cultural other within the educational institution. Asian/ Chinese scholarship is a sub-branch within the United States universities. Yet, the status of the classic as opposed to contemporary Chinese/ Asian studies is very different. Classic Asian studies are highly respected because of their



'arcaneness'. Classic Asian studies are regarded as scholarly and intellectually animating. Contemporary Chinese /Asian literature is 'doubly marginalized'(*Ibid* 125) because modern Asian /Chinese literatures are often criticized for not being 'literary ' and when they are considered 'literary ', 'they are often judged to be tainted by hybridization'(*Ibid* 126). The problem confronted by Asian /Chinese scholars in the States is their powerlessness to seek new representations; their cultural representation is continuously regionalized and marginalized. The trait of contemporary Chinese writing, according to Chow, 'is an investment in suffering, an investment that aims at exposing social injustice.'(*Ibid* 102) Chinese literature in the United States, therefore is confined to homogeneity: political powerlessness. Such political powerlessness undermines the plausible heterogeneous development that a literature should carry no matter whether it is specifically Chinese or more generally Asian. The dominant traits of Chinese literatures remain those of helplessness, suffering, and victimization. Chinese and Asian literature are further marginalized, regionalized and localized. This is what Abdul R. Mohamed and David Lloyd refer to as minority discourse,

minority discourse is, in the first instance, the product of damage, of damage more or less systematically inflicted on cultures produced as minorities of the dominant culture. (*Critical Critique*)

Rey Chow further analyses such minority discourse stemming from an obliteration of its very articulation,

Postcolonial literatures are linked to the hegemonic discourse of the west as such.... Always effectively viewed as a kind of

minority discourse whose existence has been victimised and whose articulation has been suppressed. (*Writing Diaspora* 101)

Minority discourses survive at the edge of literature and of the hegemonic forces of globalisation.

The other problem that Chow has raised is that of the inadequacy of the construction of Chinese identity by Chinese intellectuals as '...many third-world intellectuals (who) choose to live in the "first world" function' (*Ibid* 99). Chow observes "why should we believe in those who continue to speak a language of alterity-as-lack while their salaries and honoraria keep rising (*Ibid* 17). The intellectual's ambivalence in championing "third-world" representation while enjoying first-world privilege is under attack. Chinese intellectuals who go to the United States from China undergo a sense of changing identity and status. In Chow's opinion, these intellectuals are displaced and their identities are transformed,

Purloined aggressively from its original place, this displaced object becomes infinitely reproducible in the cosmopolitan space.

Displacement creates identity of the ever-shifting. (*Ibid* 45)

According to Feng Lizhi, a diasporic Chinese scientist in the States, intellectuals should be something more than machines, they should produce knowledge,

Our universities produce tools, not educated men. ....our graduates cannot think for themselves. China's intelligentsia has still not cleansed itself of this tendency. ....Knowledge should be independent power. It must never submit, for knowledge loses its value as soon as it bows to power. (*Ibid* 88)

The power referred to above is that of the Communist power of the People's Republic of China. The intelligentsia in China has to submit to the Communist hegemony.

Chow further links the sub altern nature of Chinese identity to Chinese women's construction of their subjectivity. Chinese women's subjectivity is not constructed out of a psychoanalytic formation but by a construction out of sub-alternity,

They ("Third-World" feminists) speak with the awareness of "cross-cultural" speech as a limit and their very own use of the victimhood of women and "third world" cultures are both symptomatic of and inevitably complicitous with the "first-world"... 'Women are still not a legitimate scholarly concern. (*Ibid* 100)

The above two quotations reflect the inseparable relationship between the third-world women as victims and the general interpretation of Chinese (and Asian) intellectuals subject to discourses of dominance.

Chinese women are not only depicted as the victims in a monolithic first-world culture, 'Chinese women, are, in terms of the structure of discourse, a kind of minor of the minor, the other, to the woman that is Chinese man. (*Ibid* 111) If Chinese women are inferior in the "First-World", their position and subjectivity is further undermined because Chinese men exert a further hegemony over them. This situation is also congruent with what Spivak has referred to as; 'The white man saves the brown woman from the brown man.' ("Can the subaltern speak?"



297) Woman is always an object that is likely to be picked up when First World and Third World discourses are in confrontation.

The double-otherness of Chinese women is displayed when we review Chow's following comments,

They (overseas male Chinese intellectuals) are minors and women when faced with 'foreigners'; they are fathers when faced with 'insiders', especially women. (*Writing Diaspora* 110)

The subjectivity of Chinese women is therefore doubly displaced, because the subjects who displace them are two groups of subjects, those of the first-world culture and those of the 'first-men' of their own ethnic group. The sense of subalternity is therefore 'enriched' by such displacement.

From this discussion of Stuart Hall, Gayatri Charavorty Spivak and Rey Chow, we can see how the "First-world" constructs third-world culture and identity as the 'Other'. Without the 'other', there is no centre. In the process of marginalizing the 'Other', we find out that due to the wave of migration after World War II, and the subject-construction, object-formation theory concerning identity and subjectivity have been evolving. Identity is becoming, not being, and the term, 'cultural identity' suggests that 'identity' is not to be understood in terms of post-colonial contexts alone; identity is further enriched by the confrontation between politics and gender.

## Chapter Two

### Construction of Cultural Identity in *Sour Sweet*, *The Redundancy of Courage* and *The Monkey King*

In chapter one, we outline the notion of identity raised by Stuart Hall. As a contemporary cultural critic, Hall has interrogated the above notion in his criticism. Apart from postulating identity in terms of psychic formation, Hall has interrogated the discursive formation of identity that is cultural identity. In the discussion of 'Cultural Identity and cinematic representation', Hall suggests there are two ways of thinking about cultural identity. One belongs to historical oneness. The individual has, 'one shared culture, a sort of collective, 'one true self' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.' ("Cultural Identity and Cinematic experience" 69) In other words, cultural identity in the first way of thinking is formed in terms of one shared historical and cultural experience. In the second way of thinking about cultural identity, Hall further contends that,

there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute what we really are'...We cannot speak for very long, with an exactness, about one experience, one identity without acknowledging its other side-the differences and discontinuities... Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something, which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture...they undergo constant transformation. Far

from being externally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to continuous 'play' of history and power. (Ibid 70)

The above diagnoses reflect a contemporary diasporic concern for the construction of identity. Cultural identity is constantly shaped by different historical pasts, which contribute to constructing the present. Hall does not deny the significance of historical constructs and yet he reaffirms that even history is constantly shaping and changing. Cultural identity is a 'production...never complete, always in process'. (Ibid 68)

In his other famous article, "*The question of cultural identity*", Hall has raised our consciousness about the formation of contemporary identity. According to Hall, the general concept of identity can be divided in three historical stages. The first is the Enlightenment Stage, the second is the stage of the sociological concept of identity, and the third and last is that of the post-modern subject.

In the Enlightenment stage, identity is still perceived as an intact, whole, one-ness. The self as a completed individual is often perceived as a male,

The Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as fully centred. ...The essential centre of the self was a person's identity...(for Enlightenment subjects were usually described as male) identity". ("*The Question of Cultural Identity*" 275)

In the modern world, due to mobility of population and information, the self constantly interacts with the outside world, shaping the concept of the individual in the construction of identity. Hall has shown how the post-modern subject has



been fractured due to different academic and social discoveries. In Hall's opinion, cultural identity is a subject subjected to different constructions. There have been five such constructions in the post-modern era. First is the Marxist construction and second is Freud's psychic formation. The third construction is Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of language as a set of rules within which we have to position ourselves; fourth is Michel Foucault's 'genealogy of the modern subject'(Ibid 289); the fifth and last construct of contemporary identity is feminism, in which the self becomes gender conscious. In Hall's opinion, these five movements have decentred the 'self' and identity has thereby become more interactive with the world. Identity is never fixed and historically stagnant. The final point Hall makes in his article is to do with the discussion of the effects of globalization. Constant changes, transformation, and suturing become central to the construction of cultural identity.

Hall raises a pragmatic concern that cultural identity in the contemporary world has become a means to unify countries. Subject to the migration of the past century and the maturation of third-world migrants to the first world. The cultural discourses of the first world have become hybridized because of the suturing of different cultures in the same space at the same time.

Western Europe has no nations which are composed of only one people, one culture, ethnicity. Modern nations are all cultural hybrids. Instead of thinking of national cultures as unified, we should think of them as constituting a discursive device which represents difference as unity or identity. They are cross-cut by

deep internal divisions and differences, and 'unified' through the exercise of different forms of cultural power. (Ibid 297)

Cultural identity becomes an emergent construct to unify a hybrid nation, with hope that through sharing the oneness of cultural identity a national identity can be reinforced. National identity is constructed based on cultural construction rather than biological deterministic construction. An 'Imagined Community', in Benedict Anderson's terms, is therefore formed (*Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* 152) .

Cultural identity has therefore become a prominent notion in cosmopolitan literature. The issue of cultural identity obviously figures in those novels of Timothy Mo's, *The Monkey King*, *Sour Sweet*, *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* chosen for treatment in this thesis. In all the above novels personal identity is subjected to constant transformation resulting from experiencing the difference between first and third (world) cultures.

The exclusion of *An Insular Possession* in this dissertation is due to its historical, documentary narration. It is a historical novel in that a masterly demonstrates the narrative technique. The use of present tense in narrating the past is an increasingly common narrative technique in contemporary novels. The past is brought to the present. The use of present tense narrative in a historical setting and the Victorian regime are not however parts of the main focus on identity in this dissertation.

The four selected novels share a common setting in that they are all about Third world people in confrontation with First-world cultural, political and economic constructs. *An Insular Possession* demonstrates how history is



manufactured through various employments of narrative techniques like journals, diaries, and newspaper articles. Personal and multifarious narrations are intermingled which brilliantly show how history is manufactured. Also, the relatively absence of the gender characterization in *An Insular Possession* will make the following chapter in the discussion of women's sub-alternity. *An Insular Possession*, sets a century ago, becomes a remote novel in comparison with the other four novels.

### ***Sour Sweet***

The focal discussion of identity in this dissertation will be on *Sour Sweet*, *The Redundancy of Courage*, *The Monkey King* and *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*. *Sour Sweet* particularly, I shall argue, involves a new interpretation of Chinese diasporic identity. Therefore, the novel receives the prior treatment in the discussion. However, what captured the attention of the critics when the fiction first appeared in 1982 were the Triad Societies in the novel,

*Clashes in Chinatown*(*Sunday Times* 41); ...embroiled in a feud between rival Triad societies, ...Triad lodges hidden beneath the streets of a metropolis that is hardly even aware of its existence (*New Statesman* 27); Interwoven with the narrative concerning the Chens is another about the operations of one of the Triad Societies in London, the Hung Family, which bears a strong resemblance to the Mafia...(Times Literary Supplement 502)

The excerpts of book reviews quoted above show how the theme of Triad societies captures the attention of non-Chinese cities and readers of novels concerned with Chinese. For foreign readers, Triad societies are a prominent Chinese feature.



Yet, my discussion will be concerned with the notion of identity as it is conveyed through the novel. The beginning of *Sour Sweet* captures a sense of being in-between and homeless. The beginning of a novel is crucial as it conditions all readers to the subsequent experience. For example, in the beginning of the Bible, the story of creation establishes in the reader's mind a sense of the power of the only God, of the legitimacy of the origin. However, the beginning of *Sour Sweet* does not trace the origin but gives a sense of cultural and geographical in-betweenness,

The Chens had been living in the UK for four years, which was long enough to have lost their place in the society from which they had emigrated but not long enough to feel comfortable in the new... Chen had lost his claim to clan land in his ancestral village.(SS 1)

Chen has lived in a foreign land for some time; uprooted from his ancestral connection with his homeland, he has not adapted to his immigrant life. The concept of an in-between cultural identity begins the novel and prevails throughout it. Chen is not a Hongkonger nor is he an Englishman, 'But in the UK, land of promise, Chen was still an interloper.'(1) Even after he has set up the Dah Ling Restaurant, he still does not feel at home, 'Chen felt at home and yet not at home. He had been more comfortable rootless.' (135) Going to a new land to work and to survive economically, Chen and Lily, his wife, are not going to enculturate themselves in their new society but merely to survive within it. Economic struggle precedes cultural struggle. The Chens constantly distance themselves from English culture not in their way of living but in their way of

thinking. Even when she faces the loss of her husband, Lily thinks, 'We Chinese know how to look after our own.'(278) Notice how this isolated mentality is emphasized both in the beginning and the end of the novel, suggesting that Lily is unlikely to change her mentality and will continue to live with a sense of exile. She will continue with her own in-between cultural identity for the rest of her life. In-betweenness emerges as a result of a failure of acculturation.

The sense of in-betweenness is further emphasized by the location of the Dah Ling Restaurant and of Chen's role between his family and the loan sharks (the Triad societies). The Dah Ling Restaurant is located at a remote and deserted place, Gerrard Street. Mo describes the place as, 'No one had wanted the property...The Council was only too pleased to see someone move into the area'(90). The Other race is pushed into the Other place where no one else is wanted. Though the Dah Ling take-out Restaurant does well, Chen faces financial crisis because of his father's illness in Hong Kong. The burden of medical fees leads Chen to borrow money from the loan sharks. Failing to return the money, Chen resorts to transferring drugs for the Triad society, in which he fails and gets killed. Chen is caught between the Triad society and his own family. He does not tell Lily about the debt nor does he tell the Hung family (the Triad society) that he cannot return the money

The Chens are nationally English but culturally Chinese. Chen, Lily, Mui (Lily's sister) and Chen's own father have moved to Britain one after another. Their pasts are in Hong Kong whereas their present and future are in Britain. The single exception is Man Kee, the son of Chen and Lily, who is born and grows up in Britain. Man Kee's past and future are both in Britain. Chen and Lily live in



their own cultural circle until their opening of their take-away shop. Chen initially works as a waiter at a Chinese restaurant, while Lily stays at home as a housewife, a dutiful housewife who puts the family first. The discourse about women in Mo's novels will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Homi K. Bhabha in his *The Commitment of Theory* (1994) raises the issue of the realm of beyond, stressing that the cultural hybridity is the latest product of post-colonial literature. He raises the discussion of cultural hybridity in relation to cultural difference and cultural diversity. Cultural difference, according to Bhabha, is constructed in relationship to the concept of The Other,

In order to be institutionally effective as a discipline, the knowledge of cultural difference must be made to foreclose on the Other; difference and otherness thus become the fantasy of a certain cultural space or indeed, the certainty of a form of theoretical knowledge that deconstructs the epistemological 'edge' of the West. (*The Location of Culture* 31)

Bhabha here further extends Said's analysis of The Other in *Orientalism*. The Other is the oriental constructed under the hegemony of the Occidental. The juxtaposition between immigrants and a new western world suggests the immigrants' experience and their perception of identity. *Sour Sweet* features 1960s immigrant experience and indicates the significance of post-colonial literature, something which has not been widely discussed in articles concerning Mo (details in Chapter Four). Cultural hybridity is not found among the enclosed immigrant circle. The Chens can only experience the cultural incommensurability



since they always feel that they are the Other and that the English perceive them as the Other as well. Once when Chen went to work in mid-morning,

...he was conscious of the accusing looks. Had he left for the house earlier with other men going to work it wouldn't have been so sad; as it was he had to stand self-consciously in a line of women with shopping bags. ...There was a reassuring anonymity about his foreign-ness. (SS 9)

This is why Chen always feels that he is an interloper. Chen induces this sense in his son as well. Once Chen took Man-Kee to see a ship and told him, '...Son, because it is the ship that will take us all back home when we are finished here. It will take you to your homeland, Son, which you have never seen.'(155) Chen believes that Man-Kee will be like him, taking Hong Kong as his homeland. The statement is strangely ironic because Hong Kong is a homeland that Man-Kee has never seen. What Mo depicts here is a line between the secluded immigrants and the locals. This is not the realm of beyond but the realm of difference.

Man-Kee is born and grows up in England without the history and past of another land. Man-Kee is more likely to become a cultural hybrid. Robert Young in his *Colonial Desire* has given an account of the term, hybridity,

...cultural interaction, language and sex, merge in their product which is characterized with the same term: hybridity. ...as the OED has put it, 'of human parents of different races, 'half-breed'...A few examples of this word occur early in the seventeenth century; but it was scarcely in use until the nineteenth. 'Hybrid' is the nineteenth century's word. But it has become our own again. In the

nineteenth century it was used to refer to a physiological phenomenon; in the twentieth century it has been reactivated to describe a cultural one. (*Colonial Desire* 6)

Hybridity in the nineteenth century was used as racial description. Contemporary theory applies the hybridity concept to the study of cultural hybridity. A subject is constantly evolving from different confrontations of cultures. Man-Kee faces two sharply different cultures. One is the secluded Chinese way of teaching from his family. The other is the English educational world. Man-Kee receives double education and double values. He is bullied in the school. The bully at school suggests rejection, a denial by the monolithic English boys as a result of cultural difference. Lily resorts to solving the problem by teaching Man-Kee kung fu (or *goong foo* in the novel) for self-defence, whereas Mui gives Man-Kee an exposure to the English mentality. Mui's readiness and adaptability to her new immigrant life aroused Lily's suspicion of Mui's bad influence upon his son, 'She (Lily) must avoid Mui influencing him with some of the increasingly peculiar ideas she had.' (SS 175) Lily is anxious about Mui's influence upon Man-Kee whereas Chen is worried about too much 'female influence' upon Man-Kee, 'He must spend more time with Man Kee, he decided, staring into that infant's open, phlegmatic eye. He couldn't approve of all this female influence.' (54). Various members of the family are competing to influence and to nurture Man Kee. Yet, from the narrator's description, Man-Kee will be a cultural hybrid, 'Man Kee, happy child, was getting a fresh start. He had no history, no heritage to live up to, no goal to fulfill, no ancient burden to carry.' (111)



As mentioned earlier, Mui is more open to English culture. Before the opening of the Dah Ling Restaurant, she stuck herself before the television, watching the English channels,

While this (Chen and Lily are arguing about the size of Man Kee's head) had been going on, Mui had been watching television, with her chin cupped in her hands and her elbows on her knees. (17)

She also refuses Lily's request to bribe the driving examiner. She knows it is not proper to pay tea money to the examiner. After her marriage with Mr. Lo, she starts a Fish and Chips shop, which significantly symbolizes her cultural transformation. Mui and Man-Kee are cultural hybrids in the novel.

The pattern of Man Kee and Mui versus Lily and Chen forms an interesting contrast in the novel on the notion of cultural identity. We have in the previous paragraph showed that both Man Kee and Mui are cultural hybrids. In contrast, Lily and Chen comparatively change less. Both Chen and Lily more insist on their own ways and practice when they confront problems. Chen, for example, resorts to the Triad Society for remittance to his sick father. Lily teaches Man Kee kung fu to defend himself from the schoolmates' bullying and in the end of the novel, she insists that 'We Chinese know how to look after our own' (278). The way that Chen and Lily solve problems are 'internal'. The sense of powerlessness of immigrants in response to the difficulties is strongly conveyed.

### ***The Redundancy of Courage***

This novel is obviously based on the ex-Portuguese colony of East Timor which appears in the novel. Danu is an off shore island of Australia. The hero



and narrator is Adolph Ng. The narration is self-conscious and constantly captures the attention of the reader,

You (the reader) are probably wondering about me. I don't blame you. When a man writes, you get the core of him...My name is Adolph Ng. Please laugh. To pronounce it, imagine you have been constipated a long time. Now strain. There you have my surname. You know I am of Chinese race and you may surmise that in despite of my occupation of hotelier-if you are given snobbery, or are merely realistic-I am an educated man. I am a man of (the) modern world. (RC 24)

Ng directly addresses his reader about his background and the proper way to pronounce his name. This sort of self-referential and self-conscious writing technique is also found in John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* for example. Yet, Mo impresses readers with Ng's crudeness rather than his sophistication. Ng by making fun of his surname in manner does displays his vulgarity. He also makes fun of his precious flush toilet, 'I assure you, but the stinks were as nothing at that moment to the hotelier who owned ten of the fifty flush toilets in Danu.' (RC 16) In the latter part of the novel, Ng and his colleagues have to make use of their urine to activate a bomb. The crudeness of language transfers readers into a world of cruelty.

In *The Redundancy of Courage*, this self-referential technique draws the reader's attention to the hero's situation and his self-hood, thereby establishing a relationship between the readers, the narrator and the world that the narrator confronts. Ng is typical diasporic Chinese. He has an extended overseas family

tree. Diasporic Chinese figure widely in *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet* as well. And Mo captures the sense of exile among diasporic Chinese, which is what makes Ng a cultural hybrid in Danu. Ng asserts,

They -we- had been the ones who'd had the most to lose by Independence. Most Chinese didn't give a damn about politics, independence or dependency, it was all one and the same to them.

(RC 7)

The Chinese do not care about dependence or independence because they are there (Danu) to earn a living,

I had arrived in the Chinese quarter; that is, the district of the stores and repair shops. It was thronged with people, almost all of my own race. They didn't want to leave their business unattended, were far more conscious of the risk of looting by Danuese than of any threat posed by the invader....the colonial regime offered peace and stability, the given framework in which they could prosper without worrying about big things. And we were resented by the Danuese, of that there could be no doubt. Exploitation was the name of the game. .. We held a stranglehold on the economy: transport, meaning the trucks which roared up and down the awful roads; the distribution and export of the coffee-crop; the retail goods we hawked upcountry at inflated prices.(RC 7)

In the above description, Mo overtly conveys the typical Chinese cultural representation of overseas Chinese. Culturally, in the eyes of the Danuese, the Chinese are capitalists who have penetrated into the economy of East Asia.

The fact of being economically engaged but politically apathetic is strongly conveyed throughout the representation of the Chinese. Yet, our hero, Adolph Ng, is engaged with the political movement in the novel. Ng would like to be an hotelier but the political uprising has disavowed him as an hotelier. Ng's hotel is confiscated and he is pressured to become a member of Fakoum and, once, a servant in the *malais* government. Politically, as Chinese, he has no real choice, since Danu, after all, is not his nation. In terms of political identity, Ng is not positioned nor can he be. Notice that we are informed about his family overseas tree,

My Macao Uncle, my Vancouver Cousin, part of that complex, extended family network, the reliability and efficiency of which could never be doubted for a moment by any of its members...(RC 24)

Overseas Chinese have lived in their imagined (cultural) community. Ng is a cultural hybrid whose identity is constantly being transformed by political changes. His Chineseness is only a matter biological, ethnic connection. His sense of identity is always undergoing suture. Under the control of the *malais* and later Colonel Goreng, his identity is constantly changing. Ng is always in exile.

Mo has established Ng in a politically marginalized position. He is neither devoted to Fakoum nor the *malais*. Ng is waiting to be given a role in the wars,

In all this X-Ray had somehow forgotten to give me a role. Or, come to think of it, maybe he (a) didn't trust me, (b) wanted to keep me alive for sabotaging the planes. At any rate, I began to



feel very lonely out there by myself and rather a conspicuous target. (RC 249)

Ng's role of otherness in the war shows how uncertain his position is. Ng is not a Portuguese, he is not a Danuese. He is Chinese in Danu. His marginal position makes him politically rootless and powerless. Ng is conscious of his neutral political position. He wants a safe position but ends up as an object of use and he is aware of his conspicuous position. Therefore, it is not surprising when we read about his impotency to convince the first-world press about the nature of the annexation of Danu by the *malais*. Ng is chosen as the representative of the Danuese to convince the first-world press about the stability and prosperity that the *malais* have brought forth. Ng is selected. The journalists are also chosen. Ng has no choice and his answer to the Colonel reflects his powerlessness to express what and how he really feels. The Colonel tells him what to say,

Don't get any clever ideas,' the Colonel said. We'll tell you what to say. And you say what we want to hear, or you take a long walk. The Australians can't take you with them, you know.' Whatever pleases you, *tuan* (the colonel), I (Ng) said. (RC 339)

Ng is presented as a cultural hybrid in the novel. He is Chinese. He is born in a Portuguese, East Asian colony and then he is subjected to a variety of different political regimes. He has been educated in Toronto, in a first-world institution. At the end of the novel, we are told that Ng has chosen to live in Brazil. Although he is free from the Colonel's control, he is going to subsume himself into another Third-World culture. The sense of exile prevails at the end of the novel. Ng's sense of identity continues to be transformed and changed. He is

always in the process of becoming rather than being, which Hall has defined as a trait of post-modern, cultural identity. Ng is a hybrid.

Apart from the discussion of Ng's cultural identity, the identity of the Danunese is also a major concern of the novel. The native Fakoum and the invader *malais* are fighting for control of Danu. The invading *malais* are supported by hidden American technology and funding because there is a tunnel under the island of Danu which can allow the passage of a nuclear warship. The Danunese have just liberated themselves from the Portuguese colonizer's control but are then subjugated to the new colonizer's (malais) annexation and colonization. From Ng's narration, we are told that the history of Danu is brutal and violent. The official narration given by Colonel Goreng's wife to the journalists of the west tells a quite different story. Ng's narration is brutal, violent and full of atrocities. The history of Danu is fragmented and subjected to different powers. Ng is constantly shaped by different narration, which resulted in his stronger sense of exile. Homi K Bhabha has related this kind of fragmented narration to the disseminative nature of culture. Bhabha analyses the influence of narration upon the subject,

This narrative inversion or circulation - which is in the spirit of my splitting of the people - makes untenable my supremacist, or nationalist claims to cultural mastery, for the position of narrative control is neither monocular nor monologic. The subject is graspable only in the passage between telling/told, between 'here' and 'somewhere else', and in this double scene the very condition

of cultural knowledge is the alienation of the subject. (*The Location of Culture* 150)

In the disseminative process of culture, in the process of locating culture, the intuition of culture is always told and caught in an in-between space of narration. The narrator is both the informed and the informant. Ng is in exactly such a position. He is told what to tell to the journalists. He is not a political and cultural planner and initiator and therefore his sense of alienation grows even stronger. He does not have any sense of mission towards the building of Danu as an independent nation.

The *malai* invaders become the rulers of Danu even though Fakoum resists. The *malai* invaders have their own narration about the conquering of Danu. They claim that Danu is ancestral by its link with the *malais*; the annexation is a union rather than the annihilating of one ethnic group by another. The act of conquering is legitimized. Danuese identity is under the construction of the invaders. The Danuese are, after all, linked to the *malais*, according to Mrs. Soreng,

The day after their arrival they got a full-scale historical briefing on Danu. There was a lot on the early history, less on recent events. Mrs. Goreng was able to make it sound romantic-good copy for the female journal from the up-market US ladies' magazine- so we heard about the Spice and Sandalwood Trades, the black Portuguese, and then an interracial love story which Mrs Goreng had invented herself. She told some lies about the close relations between the old *malai* half of the island and ours which had, she



said, ...it was not an invasion but a reunion...There was a common inheritance of language and culture, she claimed. A whole series of lies about the Revolution, FAKOUM, the IP and the Civil War followed...(RC 341-342)

What Mrs Goreng narrates is the terrorist's own official narration about the history of Danu. Mrs Goreng is constructing a false sense of national identity before the journalists of the west. Here we can see the power of propaganda in narrating history. The invaders, the *malais*, are inventing a history of their own. The *malais* legitimize their rule in Danu by their propaganda on overseas television. The relationship between propaganda and politics is ineradicable.

Ng's narration of atrocities in Danu provides a double sense of the ways of constructing identity. As a marginalized hybrid, Ng is able and is forced to alienate himself from the Fakoum Independence movement. Ng is there to survive for himself rather than surviving for Danu, unlike Osvaldo, the Danuese nationalist. Also, because of Ng's later recruitment into the Colonel's domestic employment, another narration concerning the history of Danu is further established. The double narration provides double narratives to readers concerning the construction of history and identity. The ceaseless confrontation of different political movement makes the subject's sense of cultural identity constantly evolve. Ng can only find a cultural identity, not a national identity, because of his marginalized nature. As Hall has said, because there are many hybrid subjects in the modern world, unifying the nation through the construction of cultural identity becomes the only plausible way. ("The Question of Identity" 297)

### ***The Monkey King***

The title itself is foreign and oriental. The character of a monkey will not be unfamiliar to western readers, but the Monkey King will certainly be something foreign. The sources of the Monkey King are not a western literary construction. The title leads readers to enter an emphatically foreign cultural world, just the hero of the novel, Wallace Nolasco, is also about to enter a Chinese family, Poon. Wallace is a Portuguese from Macao. He looks like a Chinese but the Wallaces identify themselves as Portuguese.

The book review of *Times Literary Supplement* mentions the novel together with the *tai-pan* culture, a perspective occupied by many, particularly masculine, Occidental eyes,

Hong Kong appears in one of two ways in contemporary novels. There is the Hongkong of *tai pan*, the heroic western figure striding against an exotic background achieving great feats of capitalist accumulation against overwhelming odds...The other, more recent Hongkong owes its existence to the Vietnam war, which brought American soldiers enjoying 'rest and recreation' and a new place for Hong Kong fiction: an international espionage centre, complete with lingering colonialism and a vast drug trade. ...Timothy Mo breaks new ground with *The Monkey King*. He writes from within, from real acquaintance with the feeling that sweeps the local population as a typhoon draws across the South China sea...(Times Literary Supplement 757)

The review of *Times Literary Supplement* sums up the representative Hong Kong in the eyes of foreign fiction. James Clavell's *The Noble House* and *The world of*

*Suzie Wong* written by Richard Mason are representative of Hong Kong in the foreign eyes in terms of money craving and sex hunting. Hong Kong is represented as a place of exploitation of money and sex by the well-known fiction. Mo breaks a new ground in terms of narrative location. The content and the presentation of Hong Kong as a money-craving port are still there.

The distinctive difference of *The Monkey King* compared with the previously treated two novels is that the Western hero, Wallace Nolasco begins as a subordinate of the Chinese Poon family. He is a parasite in the novel until the death of the patriarch Poon. He relies on the wealth of the Poon family. A strong sense of cultural alienation prevails in the novel when Nolasco stays with the Poon family at Robinson Path, remaining an insignificant family member. This outstanding depiction of the Other culture brought forth by Wallace Nolasco enriches the novel.

The constant depiction of Otherness begins in the novel with the antagonism

between Chinese and Portuguese,

On the whole Wallace avoided intimate dealings with the Chinese. Despite a childhood spent cheek by jaundiced jowl with the Cantonese in Macau, he still found the race arrogant and devious. Worse, they revelled in the confusion of the foreigner: turning blank faces to the barbarian and sneering behind his back. (MK1)

The beginning of the novel tells us of cultural incommensurability between Wallace and the *other* cultures and yet people from these different cultures are



going to marry. Worse, they are to be married 'by order', for monetary reasons and without regard to race:

When Wallace was instructed to marry May Ling, he found it no stranger than being required to ally, say with a White Russian or an Indian. In many respects it was easier to marry Chinese, although (he had to admit) the Poons would not have been his own ideal choice. What the Poons - more accurately Mr Poon-had, though, was money. Plenty of it, according to the rumours, which was not the situation of the Nolascos. (1)

What is there are the economic ties, which is what Wallace is really 'instructed' to marry. Wallace is subjected to an economic hegemony. For May Ling, the marriage is an arranged one by her father,

She was a scrawny, sallow girl, just twenty at the time the marriage negotiations started. ... The basic contract had, however, already been hammered out in studiedly elliptical meetings between himself and Mr. Poon. (8)

Both May Ling and Nolasco live in an arranged marriage. Because of this, Nolasco always feels himself as the other of the family and he sees other family members as the Other, too. Presenting Oriental culture as the Other is a prime means of constructing Oriental culture in the novel. Before analysing the Orient as the Other in the novel, it is necessary to review the discourse of the Other in Said's *Orientalism*, so as to throw light on the relationship between the Orientalist and the Oriental, Said says that,

The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or-as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory-taken over. (*Orientalism* 207)

The nature between the Orientalist and the Oriental is a form of power struggle. Nolasco carries an Orientalist attitude,

He enjoyed watching matches at the hockey club but resented having to rub shoulders with the Goan Indians, hairy, dextrous men. ...'Damn Choges,' he would mutter as the stink of the bean-curd they broiled in garlic wafted into his room from the warren kitchens across the road. ... They (pyjamas) were decadent, sloppy, sleazily suggestive and, in the last analysis, part of the accoutrements of Chinkiness... He courted the hoots and abuse of the younger Chinese as affirmations of his own superiority. (*MK* 4)

In the eyes of Nolasco, Orientals are inferior. They are lazy and disgusting; he regards the Orientals as always carrying a foul smell. He is conscious of an affirmation of power before the Orientals. Nolasco likes to use the Orientals' supposedly inferior position to satisfy his own 'Portuguese' ego. Nolasco is conscious of what Homi K. Bhabha calls, 'the presence of difference'. (*The Location of Culture* 80)

Prior to the rise of Nolasco as the power of the family, he conceptualizes the Poon family as the corrupted and obscure. The Poon patriarch was a smuggler during the Japanese invasion, and it was from this that he earned his wealth, ‘“Tcha! That Stanley Camp. They were like rat in there. I tell you they beg me for...” And he halted on the verge of major discretion.’(MK 88) Poon is a greedy, manipulative miser. He took over May Ling’s dowries, claiming to keep them for Nolasco. Poon controls the finances of the family. Everyone relies on his money. When Nolasco arranges a diplomatic meeting with Mr Allardyce, he pays the taxi-driver from the ‘sizeable expenses Mr Poon had given him.’ (90) Poon has a violent nature. When he punishes Ah Lung for stealing his money, he hits him with a golf stick and ‘Ah Lung wept, making no attempt to avoid the heavy stroke.’(20) This form of exercising authority through violence presents the power picture of the family.

Under the tight-fisted policy, Poon’s eldest son’ Ah Lung remains a good-for-nothing figure in the novel. Ah Lung inherits the deceitful character of his father Poon. When it is Chinese New Year and the two married couples give red-pocket money (Lai-see) to each other, Ah Lung cheats the Nolascos with a lesser offer of money in the red-pocket. And he thought that one could not tell any difference if he swam in his underpants in water. (50)

Women in the novel are all muted objects. The reason and the significance for this will be further diagnosed in the next chapter. Here, we will simply review the silenced female characters. All women are parasites, since they did not go out and work, in the social atmosphere of the novel (60s Hong Kong). May Ling has no choice over her husband. As the daughter of a concubine, she does not have a



strong position in the family. Ah Fong, Ah Lung's wife, has no control over her life. She is a daughter deserted by her own family,

Having paid a somewhat excessive sum to be rid of a daughter, Fong's father....-had washed his hands of her. The new family might do with her as they wished. ...Fong's given name was 'Doh Tai': 'Bring more Brothers'. The Poon had, however, always referred to her by her family name. (MK 59)

As suggested by the above quotation, she has no decisions over her life. Even her name, 'bringing more brothers', carries her family's hope rather than carrying the expectation of her as a person. No one wants to take care of her. She is occasionally beaten by Ah Lung and remains silent, 'After beatings from Ah Lung she would lie on her bed, clutching this box.' (the box of flat tin that once contained chocolates). (*Ibid*) Fong is also assaulted by the sisters of the Poon family,

They (the sisters) loved to torment Fong, ...The pattern of the sisters behaviour had been set as they joined the rest of the household in pelting Fong with blossom as the door clicked behind her. ...advancing through a scented blizzard to thrust their fists down the back of her dress. (*Ibid*)

The sisters of the Poon family also inflict their torment upon May Ling, but May Ling is a blood relation. Therefore, the sisters cannot resort to physical abuse. Instead they quarrel with May Ling, and Nolasco knows that, 'The chief aggressors were the sisters and the amahs, in that order of bellicosity as far as

feuding against Wallace was concerned.'(*Ibid* 60) The sisters are brutal, quarrelsome, chatter-boxes.

The novel justifies Nolasco's claim to be the proper figure to restore the family's values, system, wealth and order. The strategic presentation of challenging setting complies with what Bhabha says,

Subjects are always disproportionately placed in opposition or domination through the symbolic decentring of multiple power relations which play the role of support as well as target or adversary. (*The Location of Culture* 72)

The interplay of power positions in the novel is strongly conveyed. The dominating patriarch, Poon, dominates the first section of the novel. At the end of the novel Nolasco has become the patriarch of the family, replacing Poon as the maintainer of the family welfare, wealth and order. Nolasco has become a 'Portuguese' who regulates the wealth and resources of a Chinese family. The *tai-pan* nature of being the figurehead of finance is there. A foreigner with sophistication and professional, (Nolasco is a graduate of engineering at Foochow University) he is a qualified person to be the patriarch of the family,

But his authority, diffidently worn, went unchallenged. Their (Poons) assurance was that of subordinates certain of what was expected of them. There was no longer any need for them to keep consulting him, and he welcomed this. (*MK* 214)

Before establishing his status in the Poon family, the novel recounts Nolasco's exile in the New Territories where he proves his qualifications as a mentor and leader of a Chinese community.

Since Nolasco has to evade prosecution for corruption, Poon sends him and May Ling to his house in the New Territories. Flooding troubles the village Nolasco stays at. Nolasco suggests a plausible scientific way to solve the problem by using a bomb to channel and divert the water into the crop fields. After their success, he continues to 'liberate' the village from poverty by introducing tourism and the construction of roads for goods delivery.

The presentation of the Poon family as consisting of entirely negative and useless figures and the villagers' severe flooding problem are ways to construct the Chinese as the Other in the novel. It is the Other which is the problem. In fact, the plot of *The Monkey King* is a realization of colonial discourse. Let us review a passage in Bhabha's *The other question*,

The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. (*The Location of Culture* 70)

The identity discourse in *The Monkey King* is constructed through a foreign perspective upon Hong Kong. The *tai-pan* nature is still there. The novel is about a colonizer who is justified in taking over the wealth of a local family. The major difference in the novel is that the colonizer begins with a subordinate role and what he faces is a series of difficult conditions that justify him in taking over the Chinese family in the latter part of the novel. The discourse of cultural hybrid is not found in the novel. The concept of identity presented by the novel is based upon the notion of a superior Occidental and an inferior Oriental. The brilliant discourse of cultural hybridity presented by *The Redundancy of Courage*



and the in-between immigrants in the *Sour Sweet* is different from that in *The Monkey King*. Hong Kong fiction written by foreign writers has a common trait according to Mimi Chan,

A great number of Hong Kong novels include a liaison between a western man and a Chinese woman. If the love interest is not central to the novel, it is still included almost as if it were an obligatory part of local colouring. ... The Chinese origins of the wife give the “excuse” for the exotic Hong Kong setting so familiar to the author. (*Images of Women in Anglo-American Literature* 234)

*The Monkey King* is thus an extension of the leitmotif about Hong Kong in the eyes of westerners. The novel includes the elements of marriage between a Eurasian and a local woman; an adventure to undergo and problems (the Poons) to be solved. The only difference compared with other novels written by Westerners is Wallace’s position in that he begins as a comparatively inferior outsider. Perhaps this is because *The Monkey King* was Mo’s first novel and he was still dominated by the traditional western perspective upon the Oriental, especially since the influential *Tai-pan* had preceded *The Monkey King* in the mind of Western readers already.

### Chapter Three

#### **The 'double-otherness' of female subjectivity in relation to subalternity in *Sour Sweet* and *The Monkey King*, *The Redundancy of Courage*, *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard***

In Chapter one, we have discussed the notion of subalternity proposed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Rey Chow. G. C. Spivak focuses on the social and class structure of Indians, focusing her account on Ranijit Guha's sociological classification. Spivak further diagnoses the notion of subalternity with regard to women. Rey Chow, a Hong Kong born intellectual now based in the States, has raised a similar interrogation of women in the Third World. For details of the respective diagnoses of subalternity, please refer to Chapter one. In this chapter, we will proceed to discuss subalternity in Mo's novels, *The Monkey King*, *Sour Sweet*, *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*.

The four novels can be categorised into two groups. *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet* feature Chinese women whereas *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on the Breadfruit Boulevard* deal with other categories of the Third world women. The above categorisation is due to the nature of women presented by the novels. *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet* have a brilliant demonstration of Chinese women and their muted, reticent nature. *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on the Breadfruit Boulevard* unfold the strength and the courage of women in Third-world politics. The following analysis will focus on the interrogation of subalternity and women. Subalternity as a whole represented by the ethnic group or the nation, and gendered subalternity will be the interests of this chapter.

### ***Sour Sweet and The Monkey King***

G.C. Spivak and Ranajita Guha's directions emphasise the *a(e)ntre* (Derrida's terminology: the in-between) and how subalterns are positioned in a society. A subaltern class forms due to the difference between superior and inferior classes. The subaltern is in an inferior position compared with the class above. According to Spivak and Guha,

The same class or element which was dominated in another. This could and did create many ambiguities and contradictions in attitudes and alliances, especially among the lowest strata of the rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper middle class peasants all of whom belonged, *ideally speaking*, to the category of people or subaltern class. ("Can the subaltern speak?" 284)

Hence, we can see the characteristics of as subaltern group claimed by the two critics as being linked to the lower strata of society, the marginalized people in society. Furthermore, Spivak diagnoses that, 'For the "true" subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself. ... ' (Ibid 285). The difference and alienation that characterise the subaltern are the major concerns of G.C. Spivak.

In *Sour Sweet*, the Chinese Chen family belongs to the lower strata of the British society. Chen is first a waiter in a Soho Chinese restaurant at Soho region. Soho symbolizes the marginalized and *Other* community in the monolithic British culture. Chen's social circle is confined to his Chinese colleagues, without any



interaction with the British. Chen is not British but Chinese British. Chen is alienated from British society.

The second characteristic of the subaltern nature in *Sour Sweet* is the economic struggle. Mo gives a detailed account of the Chen's monthly expenditure and, particularly, Lily's amazing saving ability,

Her husband (Chen) gave Lily £10 a week for housekeeping, in cash from his total pay in hand of six £5 notes, .... Not bad for the early 1960s. .... Of the remaining £20, £2 went on clothing and gas, Chen kept £2 for his own amusements paid £6 rent and remitted £10 to his parents....

What Chen didn't suspect was that Lily only spent around £6 of the housekeeping. She and Mui ate a frugal lunch of cabbage, rice and a two-egg omelette, occasionally enlivened with four or five shrimps which Lily tossed in just after she had smashed the entire eggs in a lightly oiled *wok*. .... Shortly before Chen arrived home the girls might have a thick slice of bread each. .... His (Man Kee's) portions of chopped liver and fish were small but amounted to more than the total food bill of the two women. By now Lily had saved £393 which she kept rolled in an old tea tin in her pantry. (SS 4)

The careful and well-planned expenditure and the 'frugal' meals suggest the economic struggle of the Chen family. Particularly, the girls (Lily and Mui) fed themselves with barely sufficient food. Later in the novel when the Chens are about to open their Dah Ling Restaurant, even Chen is surprised by Lily's

amazing saving ability, 'he (Chen) could hardly believe Lily had found a margin on the house-keeping.' (*Ibid* 84-85) Mo's detailed description conveys a strong sense of the economic struggle that prevails throughout the novel.

The two distinctive women are Lily and Mui. Lily and Mui are the Other (second sex) of the Other (Chinese ethnic). Thus, their portrayals carry the strong sense of double otherness. Before we proceed to the gendered other, we first compare the women in sub-altern notion as predicated by G.C. Spivak and Rey Chow.

Women in the sub-altern discourse are muted and caught between internal patriarchal and external imperialist ideologies. Both internal and external ideologies marginalize the position of women as women in society. According to G.C. Spivak,

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third-world woman" caught between tradition and modernization. ("Who claims Alternity?" 306)

We can see that the Third-world women are caught in-between two very different discursive formations in relation to the formation of their subjectivity. Third-world women like Lily and Mui are disavowed by both their own tradition and by modernization. Lily and Mui have been born and brought up in a 'kung-fu' (martial arts) family. 'Kung fu' (martial arts) suggests patriarchy in which male dominance prevails. Lily is a woman who has been imposed upon by male expectations,

He (Lily's father) had always to instruct a son to gain revenge for him, training the boy as soon as he began to talk. Surely such a son would be able to nest the northern gadflies. But it was not to be. This bitterness, deepening over the years, made Lily's education more than usually arduous. ... She (Lily) performed her harder exercises in the privacy of the courtyard of their own house; weapons-instruction took place in the dusty space in front of the town's small dilapidated Taoist temple. While Mui and her friends watched from the shade of an old tree where there was a seller of sugar-cane, Lily played her two-pronged tiger-fork in the hot sun.

(SS 13)

Lily inherits a patriarchal expectation, she is brought up with a male training rather than in the delicate, gentle style in which Mui has been brought up. However, the training as a 'male' martial arts practitioner imbues Lily with the strength to survive in Britain. Lily is politically and socially voiceless in Britain because of her language barrier. When Lily and Man Kee go to the airport to pick up Lily's father-in-law, Lily is not able to understand the message about the delay of the flight. When she shows the paper with the flight number to the airport staff,

The counter-girl pointed her to another. They all looked the same,..... Lily took an immediate dislike to the BOAC girl to whom she gave her paper. She had a shiny nose, and a superior manner. 'This flight,' said the young lady with the shiny nose in a superior way, 'is delayed five hours. We have been announcing it for the last hour.'..... How was she (Lily) meant to know what



they were speaking over the music, or listen to it and still concentrate on other things (like not losing Son,...). (Ibid 216-217)

Lily is socially voiceless. However, the language barrier does not hinder her strength from surviving in such a difficult situation: struggling economically to maintain the Dah Ling Restaurant and being socially inferior. Lily is a muted woman with a strength that is very different from the muted woman as victim in the subaltern discourse. In the discussion of the disappearance of female body in the Hindu tradition, G.C. Spivak introduces the idea of the speechless and powerless female, 'There is no place from which the sexed subject can speak.' ("Who claims Alternity?" 307) Spivak points out the voiceless notion of the subaltern woman in the discussion of great male gods carrying out the destruction of the female body. The sacrifice of the female body suggests the disappearance of the female figure and her voice in the Hindu tradition. Spivak claims that the 'subaltern cannot speak' in an interview conducted by Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (29 October, 1993),

So, "the subaltern cannot speak," means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act. That's what it had meant and anguish marked the spot. (*The Spivak Reader* 292)

Here, Spivak genders the subaltern as 'she', a feminine other. Lily is speechless in a monolithic society. Mui is different. She interacts with the monolithic society. She sits before the television, speechless. Her space before the television

is her sphere. Space in the feminist tradition suggests independence and individuality. In the nineteenth century literary tradition, the drawing room is a female's personal sphere. Virginia Woolf's noted *A Room of One's Own* in the twentieth century explicitly advocates the importance of a possessed space by the self in asserting one's individuality, especially for a woman. Mui has her own space in which to learn, to interact with the monolithic society. Mui is able to outwit the different practice in British society. Mui refuses Lily's request to put the tea money in the examiner's file of during the driving exam. Later after the 'Dah Ling Restaurant' has opened, Mui is responsible for the delivery of food to the customers. However, her reception of the monolithic culture also brings her the shock of pregnancy. As suggested by the novel, the unknown father of Mui's baby is a Caucasian customer to whom Mui delivers food. Mui's choice to give birth with Mrs. Laws' support symbolizes her denial of Lily.

Instead of ending up in madness, Mui ends up marrying with Uncle Lo even though she faces such denial. In the literary tradition, non-conformist women often end up mad or committing suicide. Madness and suicide are due to the conflicts between domestic and artistic aspirations. For example, Elizabeth Siddal's painting of a frustrated, confused *The Lady of Shalott* (1853) which reflects her creative talents denied in her own time. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is another example.

Comparing the roles of Lily and Mui, we have the following pattern. Lily is a daughter, a wife and a mother, and a daughter-in-law in a patrilineal and patriarchal Chinese family. Lily has done all that is expected of a Chinese woman. On the other hand, Mui is a sister, an unmarried pregnant woman, a



woman, and the wife of Lo (Chen's former colleague, not the biological father of Mui's baby). Mui's choice to give birth under Mrs. Law's nurture suggests her own denial of the pregnancy. Mui is not able to acknowledge to herself the illegitimacy since she is not able to request the biological father to acknowledge the baby. Mui's decision to live in Mrs. Law's home, giving the baby to Mrs. Law to nurture and setting up the independent Fish and Chip shop suggest a strong sense of denial.

Mui and Lily both have comprehensive portrayals in *Sour Sweet*. The novel explicitly demonstrates the struggle of the gendered 'Other'. Rey Chow also has pinpointed the main traits of discourse about the Third-World women, particularly Chinese. She has raised two concerns. First there is the question whether one can apply western theories to the analysis of Chinese women in literary creations. Second, she has summed up the twofold stream of the long-established discourse about Chinese women in the contemporary literary world. Chinese women appear as case studies and speechless. Quoting from Ong in 1988,

By portraying women in non-western societies as identical and interchangeable, and more exploited than women in the dominant capitalist societies liberal and socialist feminists alike encode a belief in their own cultural superiority.... For instance, studies on women in post-1949 China inevitably discuss how they are doubly exploited by the peasant family and by socialist patriarchy. .... By using China as a "case study" of the socialist experiment with women's liberation, these works are part of a whole network of



Western academic and policy-making discourses on the backwardness of the non-western, non-modern world. ("Violence in Other Country, China as Crisis, Spectacle and woman" 93)

In Chow's analyses of Western discourse about the Chinese and Chinese woman, first, the group are as an ethnic diagnosed as socialists, an 'other' to be watched by the west. Second, Chinese women become the national allegory of China, a victim and a sex upon whom is inflicted unfair treatment by a patriarchal society.

The second characteristic of the discourse about Chinese woman is her speechlessness. Chow borrows Johannes Fabian's concept of ' "coevalness" --of an absolute "other time." This is the time of classical history and literature, which renders Chinese women speechless even as they offer innumerable enticements to scholarly study.' (Ibid 94) According to Rey Chow, the dominant discourse about Chinese women has two major effects: women become a national allegory and they are muted. *Sour Sweet*, therefore, breaks through the problematic national allegory of the Chinese woman as an object to be gazed at. Instead, Lily and Mui are presented as subjects who manipulate their positions in the novel. Women are portrayed as subjects with courage and strength in the adversities of life.

Women in *The Monkey King*, however, display what Chow has described as speechlessness and fall into the subaltern category of those Third-World women who are victims to be saved. The central focalizer is Wallace Nolasco, the patriarch, Mr. Poon, and his son, Ah Lung. The three men in the Poon family have their distinctive characterizations and positions. Poon is the patriarch in the family before his death. Ah Lung is the Poon's eldest son who has occasional confrontations with Wallace and his father. Ah Lung is a good-for-nothing

parasite in the family. The women of the Poon family are what Rey Chow and G.C. Spivak would claim to be instances of the subaltern nature. Women in the novel are voiceless. They have internalized patriarch values, being the subordinates in the family. Before Poon's death, they rely on Poon's nurture and after Poon's death, they rely on Nolasco,

Mrs Poon had delegated the early wranglings with the trustees to her son-in-law. Now she handed over her surplus moneys to him. .... The rest of the household was quick to follow in pressing their claims upon him. 'You knew this kind of thing, Ah Wallace,' they would say, approaching him at his desk. Finally the amahs came to him. He accepted their brief graciously. (MK 200)

Women are deprived of their own individual management of economy in a Chinese patriarchal system. After the collapse of the original patriarchal system, the women in the Poon family submit their wealth to the new patriarch and colonizer, Wallace Nolasco. Nolasco's role as the new patriarch complies with what Spivak has claimed, 'White men are saving brown women from the brown men.' ("Can the subaltern speak?" 297) The women in the Poon family cannot speak English and yet they are willing to submit their wealth to the hands of Nolasco. In the novel, we are not given sufficient information to show that there are exchanges of dialogue between the sisters, the amahs and Nolasco except for the exchange of eye-contact. When the sisters saw Wallace, they 'reeled' (MK 27) and avoided conversation with Nolasco. Even though Nolasco invites conversation, the sisters just 'muttered the words' (27). What the sisters are



muttering, we are not told. Suggestively, even Nolasco is not able to comprehend what they are speaking.

Rey Chow claims that this is the situation of the Third-world woman being robbed twice,

The oppressed, whose voices we seldom hear, are robbed twice—the first time of their economic chances, the second time of their language, which is now no longer distinguishable from those of us who have had our consciousness “raised”. (*Writing Diaspora* 13)

The Poon women are first oppressed by the yellow men’s hegemony. After the collapse of the original patriarch, they are subjected to another’s domain. Their positions, however, have not changed. The women of the Poon family are still parasites. They are helpless and powerless to speak since they have been deprived of all opportunity. As Chow has claimed, ‘Chinese women are, in terms of the structure of discourse, a kind of minor of the minor, the other to the woman that is Chinese man.’ (*Ibid* 111) Mo utters this double otherness in the representation of the Poon women.

May Ling has the opportunity in the novel to exchange conversation with Nolasco. To May Ling, Nolasco is the husband with authority who transcends her position. Notice that May Ling’s marriage to marry Nolasco is arranged, May Ling is a woman without control of her life and therefore is obliged to occupy a secondary position in relation to her father and her husband. May Ling does not fight against Nolasco when he hits her, ‘For the first time in their marriage, Wallace hit his wife. May Ling rubbed her ear reflectively’ (*MK* 124). The exercise of violence by a dominant male figure upon a female represents the



victimization of Third-World women. Likewise, Ah Lung's wife does not fight against Ah Lung when Ah Lung inflicts violence on her. 'After beatings from Ah Lung she (Fong) would lie on her bed, clutching this box.' (59) (the box that had once contained chocolates). The plural 'beatings' implies that the torture is habitual, whereas the second line suggests Fong's silence and her acceptance towards the physical torture. The above discussion shows the traditional treatment of women in the novel: violence, victim and silence.

Apart from the muted women in *The Monkey King*, there are also the non-Poon women. One is inside the Poon's family whereas the others are outside the Poon's family, as represented by Mabel Yip and Pippy Da Silva. Nolasco would like both Mabel Yip and his cousin, Da Silva to be the role-models for May Ling. Nolasco 'felt no desire for May Ling' (58). Nolasco would like May Ling to be like Da Silva and Mabel Yip,

It became obvious to Wallace that what he needed in the struggle for May Ling was an ally. .... Someone imbued with proper values, not too modern, not too servile. Someone for May Ling to copy: a woman, preferably. His thoughts turned to Pippy Da Silva and Mabel Yip. They were an excellent combination. (40)

Pippy Da Silva is Nolasco's distant cousin on his dead mother's side. Da Silva is younger than he is. The role of Da Silva suggests Nolasco's expectation that Caucasian traits should be found in May Ling. Mabel Yip has a mysterious and complex background, which arouses western men's curiosity and also complies with the male gaze of western men. In Chow's discourse of the East, the East is

the regarded object. In analyzing Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* in terms of the regarded object, Chow claims,

Bertolucci's film is an excellent example of a response to modern China that is inscribed at a crossroads of discourse, all of which has to do with "seeing" China as the other. (*Women and Chinese Modernity* 5)

The Oriental becomes the regarded object for the Occidental to gaze upon. Mabel Yip is believed to have been born in Shanghai of a mother who was a White Russian princess and was rescued by her father from prostitution. 'Of all the versions of her origins, this was the one Mabel preferred.' (41). She has an opium-addicted husband. Mabel's portrayal is that of a special woman who impresses Occidental men, 'Mabel had instantly impressed Wallace as a woman of character and influence, even originality' (40). Mr Allardyce was disappointed without Mabel's presence at the dinner with Mr Poon, Nolasco and May Ling (89). Mabel is presented as a desirable object in the Occidental eyes.

The treatment of Chinese women in *The Monkey King* is that of the submissive victim and as the mysterious object of Occidental gaze. They are the sublated objects to be gazed at and to inflict torture upon. The representation of women in *The Monkey King* as subaltern is obviously displayed with its reticent nature whereas in *Sour Sweet*, women are subaltern with fortitude. The women representation in *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet* is different from that of *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* and *The Redundancy of Courage* which have an enriching portrayals of women. In the first two novels that we have discussed, women subsume into another powerful discourse. Lily, Mui (in *Sour Sweet*) and



May Ling, women of Poons' family (in *The Monkey King*) subsume into the Chinese patriarch system and an Occidental setting. The focus of women in the other two novels is the 'first-world' women in Third-world.

***Brownout on the Breadfruit Boulevard***

The representation of woman in this novel is far more multifarious than in any of the other three novels. Both the exploitation and domination of women are to be found in the post-colonial Philippines. The setting of the novel is a city in the Philippines, Gobernador de Leon. The Philippines was a colony of Spain for three hundred years and of the U.S.A. for fifty years.<sup>1</sup> The women in the novel are struggling for their dignity as individuals, as wives and as a Filipinos.

The following interrogation of the discourse about women in the novel is three fold. First there is the central figure, Mrs. Victoria Init; second there is the middle-class Miriam; and thirdly there are the lower-strata prostitutes. The three groups of women intermingle in the story plots with the politics, the press and the exploitation of the Philippines as a third-world country. The exclusion of discussion concerning Dr. Neumark in the following is due to her South African origin. This paper would like to focus on the notion of Filipinos.

Mrs. Init is the wife of a political representative. She is belligerent in publicizing and advertising 'her city', Gobernador de Leon. Mrs. Init is a participant in politics and she plans to be advertised in *Time* (Asia Tradition) (BBB 29). She would like to be Imelda Marcos,

Mrs. Init thought Imelda had got it right, mostly. She wanted to be Imelda, but Meldy without the eccentricity, Marcos without the



mistakes. That stunt with the shoes! It wouldn't have fitted Victoria at all. .... (BBB 28)

Mrs. Init was as ambitious as any woman in the world, and the way she saw it her new and developing role. (BBB 31-32)

The above quotations show that Mrs Init is a woman with political ambition. She makes a public speech, 'protecting the flower of Philippine womanhood.' (31) G.C. Spivak once address the notion of subaltern, 'if the subaltern can speak then, the subaltern is not a subaltern anymore.'<sup>2</sup> Mrs Init is with a voice in the novel. She organizes the symposium. She invites investors from China and Japan. She invites Dr. Neumark, a noted South African writer, local professors and a German professor to attend the ecological Symposium for the better development of her town. She manipulates the political structures of Gobernador de Leon. Mrs. Init is not a subaltern as seen by her position as the wife of a Representative and her ambition in politics the way for her to be a first-world woman. Mrs. Init has a strong sense of pride in her social position and she is knowledgeable about the foreign establishment,

Mrs. Init had travelled herself. She was no hick. She'd seen the Louver; she'd stayed in the Gritti Place; she'd heard a public lecture at the British Museum. The Inits were perfectly at home in alien cultures. (BBB 41)

Her role as a wife of a Representative helps her career in politics, and yet she is not a wife and a mother. Mr. and Mrs. Init are famous as a childless couple among political circles. When the informant tells Mrs. Init that her husband has got a mistress with a child, Mrs. Init is not furious at all (94-95). Her ambition in

politics therefore suggestively substitutes for her lack of fertility in her husband's family. She is a woman of politics but not a woman of maternity.

The second major figure is Miriam, who is an educated professional. She has composed poems. Miriam's role in the novel is that of a woman in the Third-world who is betrayed by her husband. Before discovering her husband's (Boyet) involvement with prostitutes, Miriam is aware that her career development has been sacrificed to her family, fulfilling her expected role as a woman of a family woman. Miriam is a gifted literary woman. She is a poet and has been the assistant editor of her college magazine. She has won a debating trophy. 'But she'd given it up for him, all but the poetry.'(24). During a dinner with an Australian lady, Miriam hints to Boyet about her sacrifice for him, and Boyet's 'unacknowledging' attitude disappoints her. Miriam, however, does not openly protest, whereas the Australian lady challenges Boyet, 'Don't be funny; it's not something that's funny for women.'(25). Even though later, when Boyet confesses his venereal disease, Miriam does not choose to divorce him but to be reticent, because 'Miriam was more Asian than educated.'(153)

Miriam is an educated third-world woman. She is gifted and yet her talent is not developed because of the values she has inherited as an Asian woman: those entailing the sacrifice of herself for her husband and family. Education does not guarantee the liberation of women from the monolithic family and sex culture.

Prostitution is the national metaphor in the novel. Prostitution is an act in which someone get paid to be exploited and physically abused. The wealthy customer pays to satisfy his/ her own desire. The novel displays the interplay between First World and the third world in terms of the metaphor of the woman



prostitute. Subjugated women appear throughout the novel. The prologue starts with a sexual encounter between a Filipino prostitute and the coprophiliac German Professor Pfeidwengeler. Bayot is addicted to child sex. One in ten of the girls in Gobernador de Leon are prostitutes (85). Women as prostitutes and as a subjugated sex prevail in the novel. The marginalizing gender becomes a metaphor in the novel for a marginalized and exploited nation. There is the rape of the forest (38) and the epilogue tells us that Gobernador de Leon allows Germany to dump its chemical waste into the sea off Gobernador de Leon,

German toxic waste was being dumped on Gobernador de Leon - the stuff that was too dirty, too unstable, and too dangerous for greater German soil itself. (312).

### ***The Redundancy of Courage***

Both *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on the Breadfruit Boulevard* exhibit first-world women in the Third world with political strength. *The Redundancy of Courage* is about the struggle of an ex-colony for independence, the struggle against a hegemony. There are two distinctive women in the novel. One on each side of the novel's political divide: Maria on the side of Danu's independence and Mrs. Colonel Goreng on the invading malais side.

Maria is a physicist and surgeon. Throughout the Danuese independence struggle, Maria sides with Osvaldo, the community leader and she later marries him. Maria, the name has a religious connotation, she who gives birth the saviour to the world is now curing wounded and infected war victims. Her role as the doctor is that of a saviour to the natives in the mountain,



they (washerwomen) did hold Maria in some serious awe since the days she'd gone into mountains with her clinic to work miraculous cures on the children, ... (RC 150)

The word, 'miraculous' suggests a religious sense. The use of 'Maria' in the novel conveys therefore both the meaning of a medical doctor and a spiritual leader. Maria in *The Redundancy of Courage* supports Osvaldo in the war for independence. When she is killed (RC 301), the Danuese independence movement is doomed to fail.

Maria is empowered with strength and strong will during the fighting against the *malais*. According to the central figure (Adolph Ng), 'Maria, of course, was in very sense the reverse of a man of blood.' (142). As an important figure in the Danu side, Maria is an alter-ego of Osvaldo, 'she was as hard-headed as Osvaldo' (181). She knows how to raise the morale of the Danuese as with her marriage to Osvaldo. Their union suggests a hope of union and stability for the Danuese.

The other significant woman character is Mrs Colonel Goreng, who is part of the political *malais* entity, which is secretly allied with the States. The name, Colonel, in association with colonial inscribes a strong sense of annexation of the Danu territory. Mrs Colonel Goreng is a diplomat, a public relations officer, a wife and a mother in the novel. Mrs Colonel is a diplomat rather than a militant like Maria. Mrs Colonel Goreng is more manipulative than Maria. Her masterly skill is exhibited in her history of the annexation, which is a re-inscribing narration of history.

What Mo has done in *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on the Breadfruit Boulevard* is to inscribe a new mode of women in the Third-world representation. Women involved with politics in the Third world are empowered with strength and voice. We should not predicate the sub-altern silence of them but broach a new mode of female representation in the Third world. Unlike the double otherness in *The Monkey King* and the *Sour Sweet*, the female discourse of *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on the Breadfruit Boulevard* called our attention to feminist discourse in Third world politics.

*The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on the Breadfruit Boulevard* bring out the notion of women in politics in the third world. G.C Spivak and Rey Chow have mentioned the double otherness and the political powerlessness of women in the Third world. The female protagonists in the above two novels broach the discussion of the way for Third world women to acquire their own voice. Maria and Mrs. Colonel Goreng in *The Redundancy of Courage* and Mrs. Victoria Init, are female leaders in their communities. Yet one would argue that their beloveds are male and that their roles in the novels are as helpers of their men's political careers. The strength and the power of the two women are constructed under the shadows of male political enterprise. The female leaders are still constrained by male discourse: they are not building their own discourse, and their roles are still those of sub-ordinates to their beloveds. However, in the Third world context, the building of a new construct must first rely on male politics. In *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*, Mrs. Victoria Init is addressing the female issue in public speech. She is making use of the advantages of male discourse to speak out for the sub-altern. The sub-altern has first to rely on male, political



power to 'speak out'. In *The Redundancy of Courage*, Maria's role is both religious and political. Mrs. Colonel Goreng is also building up her influence and 'speaks out'. Hence, we can see that the way to break the silence of the subaltern in the Third world involves first and primarily access to political power.

The treatments of the subaltern motif in *Sour Sweet* reflect the marginal social position of the major characters. In *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*, by contrast, the motif of the subaltern is not founded upon the individual position but upon larger political entities. In *The Redundancy of Courage*, the indigene is the subaltern because of her suppressed position in fighting for her own independence. The failure at the end further marginalizes the subalterns of Danu. As the defeated and colonized ethnic group, the voice of the Danuese is obliterated. Mrs. Colonel Goreng displaces the claims of their origins. The hospitality to the press at the end of the novel is a way to construct the *malais*' (the invaders) legitimate position in the narration of history and world politics.

Mrs. Victoria Init in *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard* and Mrs. Colonel Goreng in *The Redundancy of Courage* play the role of 'making' and re-inscribing history. Although they are the women in the third world, their speaking power 'undoes' their subaltern position. They are not subalterns at all.

Likewise, in *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*, the subaltern is the Philippines, a whole nation. The exploitation of dumping chemical waste into the sea of Gobernador de Leon is a violent political assault and reflects the Philippine as an exploited Third world entity of the first world. Of course, the poverty of Gobernador de Leon is the major reason for its being a subaltern in the world.



Women in the *Sour Sweet* and *The Monkey King* are **constrained** by what Spivak calls sexual production (family and female) whereas women in *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on the Breadfruit Boulevard* are **constructs** of 'social subject production (race and male) (*Race, Writing, Difference* 273). We can see subaltern women in the *Sour Sweet* and *The Monkey King* who are constructed under a patriarchal hegemony.

## Chapter four

### Heteroglossia: Different Criticisms, multiple voices

The previous two chapters have discussed the literary significance of Timothy Mo's four novels in post-colonial contexts. This chapter complements the interrogation of the traits found in the four novels with a discussion of the different critical treatments of Mo's novels. Its focal points are twofold: identity and femininity.

#### *The mapping of a post-colonial world*

*The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet* have received great attention from the cosmopolitan literary world since they are characterised by cultural confrontation and the situation of a minority ethnic group in a monolithic culture. In *The Monkey King* there is a Hong Kong setting whereas *Sour Sweet* is about the economic struggle of a Chinese family in London. Perhaps due to the depiction of Chinese in the novels, the consciousness of Chineseness has become the central theme of articles concerned with the two novels and critics.

Confucianism is often a central theme in discussions of the conflict in *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet*. John Rothfork and Pamela F. Oakes contend that filial piety is the chief bond for characters in the novel. Rothfork gives a detailed analysis set within a Confucian framework in his two articles. Rothfork suggests that *The Monkey King* is a fiction that presents the Confucian dilemma in the modern world, that of being both a Chinese and an individual who can survive in the conflicts between one's own culture and another culture. Rothfork suggests that Wallace Nolasco is the central figure who brings out the above interrogation

and that Nolasco is the one who is evolving into an 'enlightened Confucian'.  
(“Confucianism in Timothy Mo’s *The Monkey King*” 58)

In his first novel, *The Monkey King*, Timothy Mo presents a fictional critique of Confucian ethics. Set in Hong Kong during the 1950s, the novel questions Confucianism on two issues. First it asks if Confucianism is a dead weight of formal restrictions, crushing spontaneity and creativity. Crucial to Mr Mo’s answer is the differentiation between early Confucian philosophy, which resisted “legalistically codified and objectified norms,” from later Neo-Confucianism with its “stultifying moral zeal” (Mote 47). This distinction lays the basis for the struggle between Wallace and his father-in-law, Mr. Poon, in which Wallace triumphs because he discerns authentic Confucianism, its spirit, whereas Mr. Poon can do no more than sporadically and ineffectually follow the dead letters of ritual and tradition. (Ibid 50)

The identification of Confucianism as the crucial factor deciding the triumph and defeat of characters is excessive. Claiming that it is Wallace Nolasco who knows how to ‘discern authentic Confucianism’ excessively glorifies Nolasco. First, from the start of the novel, though Nolasco looks like a Chinese, his sense of his own family’s and his identity is colonial. Nolasco has inherited the colonial perception rather than Confucianism.

The Nolascos called themselves Portuguese, (MK 3) ... Next to Wallace’s school diploma, which hung prominently in the study at his father’s own school, there was a celebrated Victorian



photograph of British officers with pirates they had just captured.

(4)

The above quotation suggests the Nolascos' recognition of and identification with the colonial power, which conditions Wallace Nolasco's perception of the Chinese as 'Chinkiness' (4) and as the Other. Therefore, there is not sufficient evidence that Nolasco is consciously aware of or that he inherits any Confucian influence and knowledge. It is difficult to convince readers that Wallace Nolasco, without any background of Confucian tuition, 'discerns the authentic Confucianism' (Confucianism in Timothy Mo's *The Monkey King*" 50). Rothfork therefore too readily admits the influence of Confucianism upon Wallace Nolasco. We do not have sufficient resources from the text to prove that,

In the first third of the novel, Wallace considers Confucian ethics from the perspective of an outsider, an immature (immature) youth, or – conveniently for Western readers who know little of Confucianism – from the perspective of a Westerner. He feels that Confucian ethics are burdensome, inflexible and prohibitive. (Ibid)

Given the education and the family background of Wallace Nolasco, he cannot be said to have a Confucian consciousness.

Identity in Rothfork's discussion of *The Monkey King* is bound up with the assertion of individuality within the family. Rothfork points out Wallace's effort to transform his wife, May Ling. Wallace alters May Ling's reading habits and appearance into a western style. He tells May Ling to read *Reader's Digest* and introduces her to Mabel Yip and Silvia de Pippy so as to help her to brush up her appearance. In Rothfork's opinion, Wallace is looking for a counterpart and

companion in Poon's family and 'to build up a Westernized independent ego in its place.'(Ibid 54) Yet Rothfork also criticises Wallace's imposition as 'essentially a continuation of nineteenth century European colonialism in China.'(Ibid) Identity is also defined as position in the Poon family, according to Rothfork. Since Ah Lung is a good-for-nothing son in the Poon family, he 'achieves no identity and consequently fades from the plot.'(Ibid 55) Identity in Rothfork's interpretation of the novel is the position and identification found in one's community.

Similarly, Pamela F. Oakes adopts a similar Chinese framework in her analysis of *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet*. Let us first consider Oakes' analysis of *The Monkey King* before a comparative discussion of the two critics' response to *Sour Sweet*. Oakes uses the Confucian filial piety and the cultural difference between the Chinese and Portuguese to explain the relationships and conflicts in *The Monkey King*. Oakes comments that 'the survival of the family after Mr. Poon's death is contingent upon Wallace and May Ling's understanding of filial duty.'('Filial Duty and Family Survival in Timothy Mo's *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet*' 144) ... 'And it is not until they are sent to the Kowloon village that the two discover their respective filial roles.'(Ibid 145) Oakes here is following Rothfork's strategy of forcing every detail of the text into a relationship with Chinese philosophy. First, Wallace and May Ling are exiled in a New Territories village, not Kowloon. Secondly, it seems fair to suggest that the New Territories exile provides an opportunity for May Ling and Wallace to reconstruct their marital relationship and the links between them. The exposure to a strange environment prompts their trust and reliance of each other.

#### **About *Sour Sweet***



Both Rothfork and Oakes argue for the use of the Yin-yang principles to analyse the roles and the conflicts found in *Sour Sweet*. Prompted first by the repetition of *yin-yang* symbols and references in the novel, the critics are diverted into using this cultural framework to analyse its relationship crisis. Let us first review the occurrences of *yin-yang* symbols and concepts in the novel,

The robes were crisply pressed but she smoothed out imaginary creases and pulled out a tiny thread from the *yin-yang* symbol stitched onto a senior officer's. (SS 96) ... He (Chen) didn't want his son to be subjected to all this female influence either. It couldn't be good for the boy. Let *yang* balance *yin*. (110) ... Sweet too soon after salty could upset the balance of the system, disturb the whole relationship between *yin-yang*. (252) ... *Yin* must have its excessive tendencies corrected by *yang*, and vice versa too for that matter. (277)'

The yin-yang principle found in the novel affects all aspects of life for the characters, such as eating, sewing, and the up bringing of children. Yin symbolises female and yang symbolises male. The repetition and use of yin-yang principles in the fictional presentation of the novel has led to a widespread use of the principles in analysing it.

In Rothfork's article 'Confucianism in Timothy Mo's *Sour Sweet*', Rothfork uses the yin-yang principle to explain the characterisation, conflicts and tensions of the novel, claiming that Mo is one of the pioneers in pushing forward 'third-wave Confucianism' ("Confucianism in Timothy Mo's *Sour Sweet*" 49). Rothfork suggests that the Chen family,



exists as a balance between yin and yang forces, husband and wife, which are dynamic and developmental. At one point Lily recognises that it is part of her husband's "function to oppose" her: "part of the natural order of things, the cycle of constant fruitful opposites." (45). Secondly, the identity and meaning of each person are achieved through the tension between the individual and family. (Ibid)

Due to the destined polarised forces, the Chen family is therefore expected to live in conflict. Furthermore, Lily's reticent and independent character is due to her training as a boxer,

...she ( Lily) has been pushed too far in the direction of Confucian yang. Lily's formative childhood experience of *siu lum* boxing well symbolises both corrupt Neo-Confucian ritual behaviour and authentic Confucian values. (Ibid 54)

The central problem that the family confronts is not economic struggle but the testing of the yang-yin principles and Neo-Confucianism, according to John Rothfork,

The great problem, which the novel explores, is the continuity of traditional values and culture (*li*) in the turbulence of the modern world, which above all else refuses to defer to the past. Does Confucianism offer a viable way to love in the modern world? Timothy Mo's answer seems to be that it does; more, that it offers a valuable or desirable way of life (Tao). However, it is crucial to recognize that Mr. Mo is talking about a demythologized or "third-

wave” Confucianism which has been liberated from the arbitrary cultural accretions of Neo-Confucianism. This is precisely the reason why the novel is set in London and why the Chen’s must be exiled from Chinatown and the Triad: to demythologise Neo-Confucianism in order to identify its essentials, which can then be used to construct a life in the West or the modern world. (Ibid 55-56)

According to the above analysis, the novel itself is a product of contemporary Confucianism discourse. Mo uses settings and characters to see whether Neo-Confucianism is valid or not, and provides a positive answer. If however, the novel is truly an interrogation of Confucianism, the setting of London can hardly be valid. The deliberate construction of cultural alienation due to the combination of a London setting and Chinese characters will not be appropriate. The Chens escape from the Triads is a matter of escaping from danger, not a testing of philosophy. Their grass-roots background does not suggest their planning to involve themselves in the danger of a Triad murder to test whether Neo-Confucianism is practical or not. Therefore, the murder of Chen by the Triads is not simply ‘the ultimate corrupt form of Neo-Confucianism.’ (Ibid 56) Murder is the ultimate corrupt form of humanity.

In a similar way, Pamela F. Oakes adopts the *yin-yang* principle to diagnose the family relationship of the novel. Oakes suggests that the practise of boxing produces a yang (masculine) influence on Lily and therefore ‘she assumed the dominant character described by the *yang* principle.’ (“Filial Duty and Family

Survival in Timothy Mo's *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet*" 146) Her yang influence even puts her marriage in jeopardy,

Her association as a child to everything that was considered *yang* now threatens her marriage to Chen, because as wife and mother she is required to submit to the *yin* principle. (Ibid 120)

The *yin-yang* duality is widely adopted to explain the role and the nature of (Chinese) women. The *yin-yang* principle even affects the marriage of Chinese couples. Lily, according to Oakes, is *yang*. Oakes comments that there is a strong 'yang disposition' (Ibid 148) in Lily's character that leads her to become too dominant and accounts for her sensitivity 'to the main feature of this tradition – filial obligation.' (Ibid 150) The *yang* principle explains Lily's failure in her relationship with her husband and her filial piety.

The overemphasis of the *yin-yang* influence upon the characters denies the strength of the presentation of the relationship between men and women in the novel. Lily is reticent and submissive to her husband; this is at core of the novel. The particular characterisation of an immigrant couple's relationship in relation to their economic struggle is almost unique in the post-colonial novel. The analysis of the characters in terms of *yin-yang* principles alone will deny the fact that the subjects have been hybridized and are constantly transforming their consciousness of self and their perception of their environment.

From the above analysis and review of criticism concerning *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet*, we can see a number of traps for those attempting to analyse a novel dealing with a specific ethnic group. First, one can be easily drawn into the obsession with particular ethnic characteristics. Secondly, the direction of



criticism can be confined and over localized. The over-emphasis upon the Monkey symbol in *The Monkey King* has perhaps diverted the critics' attention towards particular area. Likewise in *Sour Sweet*, the repetition of *yin-yang* references accounts for a culturally specific approach rather than one treating the novel's more general post-colonial significance. The prime shortcoming of 'cultural' analysis is the further marginalization of the novels themselves. Readers or critics may consider the novels as too exclusively ethnic or regional because of their Chinese subject matter. In fact, both *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet* deserve a wider and a different criticism. Perhaps it is however with *The Redundancy of Courage* that Timothy Mo undeniably establishes his position as a writer who brilliantly depicts post-colonial traits and identity problems.

#### **The vulnerability of identity in Mo's post-colonial novels**

The unique subject of *The Redundancy of Courage* provides a good example to write about a post-colonial subject of hybridity. Adolph Ng, the focalizer and the narrator of the novel, has no historical Danuese heritage. His diasporic identity as a Chinese in a colony like Danu hints at the vulnerability of his identity. Claiming himself to be a Danuese is not convincing and even Ng admits this. Ng's strong sense of rootlessness explains his diasporic life, one lived always in exile. He is first a Chinese entrepreneur with capital who owns most of the flush-toilets on Danu. The political turbulence dismantles his identity as a Danuese Chinese and thrusts him into other, political, identities. Such an unstable and changing construction of identity leads what Bhabha claims as the state of being 'unhomely' (*The Location of Culture* 9). From the beginning of his claim to be the 'other' of the Danuese, we find that Ng is a hybridized subject with an in-

between his sense of economic and cultural position. Ng receives his education in Canada and he says that he is a

man of modern world. The world of television, of universities, of advertising, of instant communications, made me what I am. It made me a citizen of the great world and it made me a misfit forever. (RC 24)

Ng is culturally First World and yet he has to survive in the Third World. Wijesinha writes that national identity is based on 'psychological and political factors (that are themselves construct) rather than on what might more readily be defined as facts concerning people and place.' ("Timothy Mo's *The Redundancy of Courage*" 32) This accounts for what Wijesinha claims to be 'very contingent nature of identity' (Ibid 33). Ng confronts the constant destruction and construction of his sense of belonging. The radical and rapid change of sovereignty over the island of Danu explains his insecurity and sense of belonging nowhere. The novel's ending, with his choice to begin a new life with a new name in a new country (as Mr Kawasaki in Brazil) significantly tells us of his rejection of any claim to an authentic identity. Notice here the difference with the beginning of the novel before the war between the *malais* and Danuese, when he readily admits his identity as a Danuese Chinese entrepreneur. Ng replaces his original national, ethnic and social position with a new set of identities in Brazil, which suggests his exhaustion and the frustration that he has undergone on Danu.

Ng's constant transformation of identity is what Davis calls a 'chameleonic



identity' and 'an endless repositioning of identity appears to be the destiny of the transcultural subject or writer, as the parameters of definition are in constant flux.' ("Timothy Mo's *The Redundancy of Courage*: Chameleonic identity as Survival Tool" 2) Ng's inevitable transformation has led him to become a hybridized subject in the post-colonial world.

The endlessly different situatings of identity makes the hybridized subject feel that (s)he belongs nowhere and lacks any substantial sense of rootedness in a place. The hybridized subject is the one who is always in exile and who always carries the sense of foreignness as the Other.

### **A Percept of one's own**

In *Sour Sweet*, too, there is the notion of the homely and unhomely (*The Location of Culture* 9) opposition and the question of the cultural and ethnic situating of one's perception of identity. Both *Sour Sweet* and *The Redundancy of Courage* contest the notion of an individual's subjugation to a monolithic entity. Ng subsumes himself first under the Danuese and then under the *malais* while the Chens have different perceptions in confrontation with a new cultural and geographical landscape. Chen and Lily both have consistent and resistant characters in their immigrant lives. They are consistently resistant to the 'foreign' culture (that of the British) and remain in their own cultural paradigm. They are living a life of their own. Rothfork comments that 'Chen is incapable of responding to a new culture' ("Confucianism in Timothy Mo's *Sour Sweet* 59) and his negligence of the British legal system leads to his death. Mui, by contrast, has undergone a drastic change of perception of her surroundings and evolves into a post-colonial subject by acculturating herself into the new immigrant life. She



watches the English television programmes and her English is much better than Lily's. She is, therefore, responsible for the take-away customers. Sadly, her overt acceptance of foreign culture leads her to become an unmarried mother. The father of the child is suggestively a westerner. A sense of helplessness and passivity is strongly conveyed.

### **The discourse of place, the borrowing of space**

The sense of struggling with a new place is intertwined with the juxtaposition of different places in Mo's novels. There is Robinson Path on Hong Kong island and the New Territories village in *The Monkey King*; London and Hong Kong in *Sour Sweet*; the ex-Portuguese colony of Danu (East Timor) in *The Redundancy of Courage* and Canada and Brazil; and Gerberdeon de Leon of the Philippines and Japan in *Brownout on the Breadfruit Boulevard*. First, let us examine the discourse of place in a post-colonial context,

Place and displacement are crucial features of post-colonial discourse. ... It is characterised firstly by a sense of displacement in those who have moved to the colonies, or the more wide spread sense of displacement from the imported language, and secondly by a sense of the immense investment of culture in the construction of place. ... Place is thus the concomitant (concomitant) of difference, the continual reminder of the separation and yet of the hybrid interpretation of the coloniser and colonised. (*The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 391)

Characters and place are in contrast in the selected Mo novels, creating the theme of the misfit that we commonly find in Mo's works. From the above quotation,

we can see that the places make the difference between the subject and the place, which create the sense of solitude, passivity and separation.

In *The Monkey King*, Wallace Nolasco identifies himself with the coloniser at the beginning and yet he has to marry into a local, patriarchal, Chinese family. A colonial culture is going to interact or clash with an indigenous culture. The contrast between sophisticated, upper-class Robinson Path and the backward, primitive New Territories village sums up the difficulties that the protagonist confronts. In *Sour Sweet*, the lower-class Chens live in a First-world, developed society (London) but confine themselves to their own take-away restaurant. They live and work in the same place. The limited space suggests the repressive relationship between Chen and Lily, Lily and Mui. Their location of the *Dah Ling restaurant* is what Bhabha claims as 'the liminality of nation-state' in relation to minority discourse. The minority lives 'on the border line of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, so that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity' (*Nation and Narration* 320). The tension and the silence of the individuals' difficulties are symbolised through the congested space in the novel. The inability of Lily and Chen to speak in English also accounts for their strong sense of indifference to and alienation from the new culture. According to Robert Kroetsch and Dennis Lee, constructing a new language is necessary for a post-colonial subject to break away from its voiceless position. Otherwise, 'the sense of "lack of fit" between language and place' (*The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 391) appears. Although Mui is not greatly proficient in speaking English, her own codes of articulating



and communicating with customers, that help her to breakthrough the cultural and language barrier and leads her to acculturate herself into the new society.

In *The Redundancy of Courage*, the place and Ng's perception of it are mobile. The reader may find the description of warfare between the Danuese and *malais* exciting but for the protagonist, Ng, there is only entrapment. He has no ability to choose what he is or to go where he wants. Ng is always trapped by one political entity or another. He is first a Chinese Danuese and then, having been caught by the native Danuese, a fighter for independence. Later, he is caught by the *malais*. In the final part of the novel, though Ng chooses his own nationality, this merely symbolises his frustration in his original construction of identity. Ng chooses to live in South America as a Japanese, thus significantly plunging himself into a hybrid self and suggesting that his identity can be further transformed in the future. The constant movement of the chase, however, does not enhance the sense of liberty but of entrapment.

#### ***A Woman with (out) a voice?***

When attempting a discourse about women the post-colonial world, it is inevitable that one will situate women in relationship to male discourse. Spivak has mentioned the widow sacrifice in India. Woman is a role and is expected to sacrifice herself for the sake of society and its rituals. It is intriguing to find Irish women have had a similar experience. Wanda Balzano notes that there is an ancient Celtic legend about a woman being forbidden to look into a well. The metaphor of this legend is the restriction on a woman's imagination freedom. Also, woman is again a metaphor for the suppressed and sacrificed. Her creative expression and courage are suppressed,



For Irish women the attempt to (re)discover their feminine identity has been overshadowed not only by the dictates of patriarchy but also by the 'otherness' of Ireland. The anonymity of the feminine: that is, the difficulty to define themselves as women, has been further complicated by a national history of colonisation, deprivation and struggle. ("Irishness-Feminist and Post-Colonial" 92)

In other words, Irish women are experiencing an underdevelopment of their feminine identity and their sense of female self is frustrated because of the dominant male discourse. The voice of woman disappears in the traditional construction, 'Dispossessed of her body and for long hidden under negative imperatives, the 'colleen' (cliché of Irishwoman) has been doubly denied her voice.'(Ibid 93) Irish women are displaced. It is only after the construction of a new, independent voice that Irishwomen are able to detach themselves from the male construction concerning their own selves,

The Irishwoman is today emerging from her patriarchal-colonial shell and is becoming self-aware and conscious of her own capacities, liberating herself from the monolithic and passive image in which she has been imprisoned for centuries. She is doing so by rewriting the same stories and myths that have kept her in the background. (Ibid 95)

Only through voicing out an awareness of female consciousness can women liberate themselves from entrapment. In the world of otherness (in Ireland and

India), women as sacrificial figures are commonly found. Their sense of otherness on the periphery is more prominent than with men.

Women have different portrayals in Timothy Mo's novels. In chapter three, we have shown that the women in *The Monkey King* are voiceless and remain typical, reticent, Oriental women and victims. In contrast, in *Sour Sweet*, the narrator, though not a woman, successfully voices out the consciousness of Lily and Mui; he focalizes through them. Their respective attitudes to the family, to the setting up of a new restaurant and their different interactions with the English world are clearly conveyed. *Sour Sweet* is one of Mo's brilliant novels in showing women with a Chinese sensibility. Mo in this novel is breaking down the traditional, male centred narrative stance. Michael Keve has commented on the position of the focalizer in *The Monkey King* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, considering Wallace Nolasco as an insider who gives a vivid presentation of the novel's content. However, considering the position of insider, the focalizing of the narrator is far stronger and more convincing in *Sour Sweet*. Though Mui and Lily, to a certain extent, are still considered as 'sublated' objects in the novel, their consciousness of struggling against adversity in *Sour Sweet* is an initial step to give them a new voice. One of the crucial factors is their involvement with their family's economic production, which gives them a voice. Particularly, comparing with Mo's first novel (*The Monkey King*), Mo arranges more dialogues for the female protagonists in his second novel. Voice and femininity are interrelated. In commenting on Irish women's identity, Balzano is aware of the voice given to the women,

Other contemporary women writers are entering the territory of Irish literature by various means: Biddy Jenkinson by refusing the imperialism of the English tradition, Eithne Strong in moving from one tongue to another in the conscious search for a language. ... Monologues, dialogues, polyogues. Interminable voices...(Ibid 94)

The different 'logues', after all, are the symbol of writing with a woman's consciousness. Therefore, we can see that women in *Sour Sweet* are giving voice to the discourse of Chinese women.

***The narrating voice in constructing a nation, a self***

It is crucial to see that in both *The Redundancy of Courage* and *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*, women are interconnected with the politics and narrating a new history. Maria and Mrs Colonel Goreng are on opposing sides that each constructs their own version of history. Maria is on the side of the native Danuese whereas Mrs Colonel is on the side of the invading *malais*. Maria is struggling for the independence of Danuese. Maria is the woman of central focus on the native Danuese's side. She is a woman of action rather than words. Like Lily and Mui in *Sour Sweet*, Maria is a woman of strength. Mrs Colonel, on the other hand, is the manipulator who helps to create the *malais'* version of history. She invites the overseas press and tours them about the landscape of Danu and justifies the 'annexation' by claiming an ancestral link between the Danuese and the *malais*. The connection between the theme of women and creation is displaced.



In *Brownout on Breadfruit Boulevard*, the women's discourse is far richer than in any of other three novels. Women of different levels (or class) in the politics of the third world are portrayed. Knowledge becomes a weapon to strive for one's position. There are three levels of women portrayed: the upper level (represented by Mrs Init); the intermediate level (represented by Miriam and other female journalists) and the lower level (the child prostitutes).

Mrs Init is the voice of Gerberdeon de Leon's political position. She goes to Japan to invite capitalists and their investment to Gerberdern de Leon and her speech to the Filipino women is an effort to construct the female identity in the local Filipino voice. There is a short episode which suggests her shortcomings as a woman: infertility. She tolerates her husband's extramarital affairs. Her connecting of different capitalists and professors from the first world reflects the fact that she is part of Gerberdeon de Leon's history.

Child sex as a symbol of Third World exploitation has been shown in the previous chapter. Concerning the role of Miriam, a middle-class and educated woman in the Third world, she confronts what has to be commonly confronted by educated women in the Third world. She is intellectually and economically acknowledged but domestically denied. She is recognised as a person with ability. She is an editor and potentially a poet. Yet, she gives up her personal aspiration for her family. Miriam is therefore furious to find that Boyet does not appreciate her sacrifice. In the scene of her discovery of Boyet's involvement with prostitution, she is powerless and voiceless, 'After words (Boyet's words), silence. After the anger, hurt. Miriam was more Asian than educated.' (BBB 153) Hence,

the educated Asian women are still confined within their own traditional ideology when confronting domestic conflicts.

The sensibility of women's consciousness in Mo's novels is narrated by the building up of the consciousness of third world voices. Among the four chosen novels, different women with their different social positions have their respective problems in experiencing themselves as individual female subjects.

## Conclusion

The process of researching and thinking about the topic, identity, of my thesis on Timothy Mo's novels has been intriguing and self-reflexive. When I planned my thesis, it was at the time of the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China. My Master of Philosophy studies began right at the beginning of the post-colonial period, according to the official date of July 1 1997. The notion of identity has long been a problem. Yes, identity is a PROBLEM when you realize that there is another sovereignty apart from the original one. All of a sudden, a Hong Kong born Chinese finds it is difficult to fill in the blank of NATIONALITY when (s) he goes overseas and fills in the entry form for the destination country. Shall it be Chinese or British, or perhaps just a British National Overseas? Hong Kong born Chinese belong to neither Britain nor China. We are not Chinese or British. Hong Kong born Chinese are simply Hongkongers, a contemporary symbol of in-betweenness as well as marginality in contemporary political society. Hongkongers inherit culture and sovereignty from both mainland and traditional Chinese and also the colonial British.

Still, after the signing of the Sino-British Joint-Declaration in 1984, identity, nationality has become a crucial crisis that Hongkongers have confronted. Some choose to continue the diasporic Chinese community, many middle-class Hongkongers have chosen to migrate to Commonwealth countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The outflow of Hongkongers and an influx of mainland Chinese influence have unofficially symbolized the post-colonial era's beginning. Hong Kong after 1984 underwent a dramatic change, with social, educational, and political aspects. The individual had to be re-



educated about the acceptance of transition from one sovereignty to another. Under such polarized circumstances, Hongkongers have developed their own sense of identity, which is characterized by the post-colonial traits of Otherness, marginalization and in-betweenness.

Characters in Mo's novels are constantly experiencing the sense of exile. Their identities are suturing and transforming themselves. The sense of restless formation of cultural identity has distinguished Mo's skillful mapping of traits of the post-colonial literature. The interplay between the narrator's experience and his/ her world provide readers with a broader and spiritually stimulating view to read the sensibilities of the post-colonial citizens. Mo's novels have also invited further interrogation concerning women in the subaltern world and the possible cultural constraints that may appear in literary criticism. Mo's novels have also evoked certain contemporary citizens' sense of identification in an in-between emigrant world.

I find that my personal confusion concerning identity is common among other Hongkongers. Belonging neither to the mainland Chinese nor the British, we (Hongkongers) are part of the post—colonial world, characterized by hybridity. It is only through pursuing the post-colonial studies that I have been able to find an answer to my confusion concerning identity. The constant changing and the protean nature of identity that I find in Mo's novels are also applicable to the situation of Hongkongers.

Initially, I took Mo's novels as a subject for my thesis, it was only later that I discovered that I had undergone a process of self-exploration that led to my knowing Hong Kong and myself better.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Information from the Book Review, *The Sunday Times*, by Peter Kemp, 16 April 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Spivak, in an interview with Harold Veaser, *The New Criticism*, New York: Routledge, 1989: 160.

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